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# The study of Wai Phra Kao Wat in Bangkok, Thailand

## Abstract

### **A study of Wai Phra Kao Wat (Paying Homage to a Buddha Image to the Nine Temples) in Bangkok, Thailand**

**Nattaporn Kaimook**

The study presents a new form of pilgrimage introduced by Thai authorities and involving visiting to nine temples (*Wai Phra Kao Wat*) in Bangkok. I will focus on four main aspects of this phenomenon. Firstly, the study will describe the dynamic application of the practice (*Wai Phra Kao Wat*) including the forms of devotion, the designation of temples by authorities, the pilgrims' experience, and the role played by local 'communities' (*chumchon*).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the study will consider this pilgrimage as a case study with which to explore how Thai cultural phenomena provide multiple avenues for Thai people to reflect on their perception of the relation between Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism in particular) and the state. Thirdly, the study explores the contribution of 'new' performances of religiosity in popular Buddhism into shaping modern economy and rhetorical politics. Lastly, the study will provide the significance of *Wai Phra Kao Wat* that could shed light on important contemporary Thai cultural phenomena such as the emergence of 'pilgrimage tourism' on socio-cultural and economic changes and the relationship between ritual practice and Thai citizenship. The ethnographic methods including participant observation and interviewing are mainly employed throughout the fieldwork. I conclude that Buddhism in contemporary Thailand becomes an instrument to negotiate identities and meanings at the level of governance. *Wai Phra Kao Wat*, a state-oriented campaign, has been then utilised to enhance Thai capital's venture into the global economy as well as to establish regime legitimacy with the inculcation of nation, religion, and monarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study I use the term 'community' in the sense of the Thai word '*chumchon*'. '*Chumchon*' means a group of people who live in the same area and gain mutual benefit from their proximity and activities (The Royal Institute 2002).

**A study of Wai Phra Kao Wat  
(Paying Homage to a Buddha Image to the Nine Temples) in  
Bangkok, Thailand  
MISS NATTAPORN KAIMOOK**

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology  
Department of Anthropology, Durham University  
Supervised by Prof Michael B. Carrithers, Dr Claudia Merli, and  
Prof Bob Simpson  
2018**

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## List of Abbreviations

TAT	Tourism Authority of Thailand
BMTA	Bangkok Mass Transit Authority of Thailand
BTS	Bangkok Mass Transit System (the skytrain company)
BMA	Bangkok Metropolitan Administration
AIS	Advanced Info Services Public Company Limited (the mobile operator of Thailand)
TNAMCOT	Thai News Agency
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations

## Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Dedicated to  
My dearest three angels in heaven;  
King Bhumibhol Adulyadej,  
My Grandmother *Swiss Chareonsuk*,  
My Grandfather *Bamnet Chareonsuk*.

## The outline of the contents

Chapter 1 provides introductory information of the study of *wai phra kao wat*. It consists of the overview of Bangkok from dual features: the topography and the relationship between Bangkokians and the elements of Bangkok city, fieldwork experiences, aims and objectives of the study, theoretical framework, methodologies, ethical consideration, reviewing literatures and key definitions of this study.

Chapter 2 provides the fundamental concepts and disciplines of *wai phra kao wat* including meaning, the variety of arrangements, and the various routes of the practice. Then, the dynamism and development of *wai phra kao wat* as the empirical data will be analysed as the emergence of semi-religious practice in contemporary Thai society.

Chapter 3 provides the analysis of *wai phra kao wat* from a socioeconomic perspective. The researcher will examine the hybridisation of popular Buddhism, the growth of prosperity cults and religious commodification, which are grounded in the Buddhist doctrines of karma and merit. Also, *wai phra kao wat* is investigated as the emergence of the ‘new’ roles of popular Buddhism and the novel synergies of diverse forms of ‘prosperity religion’.

Chapter 4 provides the relationship between rhetoric and culture, emphasising the empirical data of *wai phra kao wat*. The symbolic and rhetorical elements of *wai phra kao wat* are employed in different viewpoints; Thai citizens’ and state authorities’ viewpoint.

Chapter 5 provides the relationship between *wai phra kao wat* and rhetorical politics. The researcher investigates *wai phra kao wat* as a place of persuasion in the conduct of the state authorities. The *wai phra kao wat* practice is interwoven with state policies of the current government. *Wai phra kao wat* becomes a political instrument to generate uncontroversial power that permits communication of current socio-cultural policies during the crisis.

Chapter 6 provides the contributions of the study of *wai phra kao wat* from four lens; religious, economic, political and ethical perspectives. The researcher presents how Thai Buddhism maintains the significance and identity. Also, *wai phra kao wat* presents the association between Buddhism and the rapid changes in contemporary Thai society.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction to *Wai Phra Kao Wat*

#### Background

Since the first time I observed *wai phra kao wat* <sup>2</sup> (paying homage to a Buddha image to the nine temples; ไหว้พระเก้าวัด), the scenarios in almost every temple illustrating the proliferation of model figures of deities, spiritual saints, venerable monks, royal kings, and even charismatic objects well decorated with colourful garlands and flowers as well as, some of them, brightening with countless pieces of gold foil completely bewildered me. Also, a composite crowd of temple visitors including Buddhists, tourists, and pilgrims seem to be happy to participate in these ritual practices. They were there to pray *katha* (‘a magic formula designated for a specific “sacred” figures’; คถา) and ask for blessing. Despite my Catholic background, I feel comfortable to visit and participate in ritual practices in Buddhist temples as I was raised in Bangkok and was rather familiar with Buddhism in urban Thailand. I argue that Bangkok religions and Thai Buddhists are polytropic, that is, they are willing to turn to any figure or practice for worship, and that they live in a polytropic environment in which a great variety of holy figures and influences are available (Carrithers 2000: 836). Moreover, I argue that Thai rituals and religious practices in the urban surroundings are adapted to be congruent with economic, sociocultural, and political changes. *Wai phra kao wat* is one such practice.

*Wai phra kao wat* is a new form of pilgrimage requiring participants to visit nine temples within a day. *Wai phra kao wat* is a term formed by three elements; ‘*wai phra*’ (paying homage to the Buddha; ไหว้พระ), ‘*kao*’ (number nine; เก้า), and ‘*wat*’ (temple; วัด). The individual elements combined signify the entangled relations between Buddhist performance and folkloric belief that represents today’s Buddhist practices in Thai society. Although it is problematic to identify the exact period of the origin *wai phra kao wat*, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) launched it officially in 2001 when they organised a seminar, entitled ‘how to develop temples to become tourist attractions in the

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<sup>2</sup> ‘*Wai*’ (ไหว้) is a gesture which is performed by joining palms together over the chest and slightly bowing the head. It is applied for greeting and showing respect to older people and the Buddha. ‘*Phra*’ (พระ) refers to either the Buddha or the representatives of the Buddha such as Buddhist images and monks. ‘*Kao*’ (เก้า) is number nine. ‘*Wat*’ (วัด) is a temple.

future' (TAT 2002). The seminar was aimed at the clergy, providing 200 monks from Bangkok with knowledge of the history and significance of the nine significant temples in *Ayutthaya*<sup>3</sup>, but it very quickly garnered wider attention (TAT 2002). The TAT applied the model further by promoting a new event in Bangkok for the general public in the form of a religious tourism campaign (TAT 2002). The prominence of the practice has come to hold a central position within Thai Buddhism, attracting both pilgrims and tourists nationwide. During the emergence of this officially endorsed practice, Thailand was struggling with radical socioeconomic and political changes and the growing number of ritual practices and spirit cults were explicitly positioned as providing mental and spiritual solutions (Pattana 2008). The promotion of *wai phra kao wat* practice has been applied to engage with the middle-class lifestyle and the radical social and economic changes in the contemporary Thai society.

The dynamic nature of the *wai phra kao wat* practice is adaptable to serve more complicated facets of the contemporary Thai society. The complex elements of the practice such as objectives, schedules, destinations, routes, and forms of transportation have been consistently adapted to be congruent with the social changes in contemporary Thai society. Apart from reinvigorating relationship between the laity and lay Buddhist practices, *wai phra kao wat* is understood to provide mundane benefits (through auspicious meanings and socioeconomic and political influence, for example). Due to the prominence of *wai phra kao wat*, the model structure has been vibrantly employed as a national event promoted by the tourist trade and public authorities. However, the practice has also attracted significant negative representation. Critics of the practice considered it a new source of invisible power that fuels social mobility and legitimates the authoritative rule of a military government. It has also been recognised as an alternative source of *cultural capital*, industriously manufactured through media campaigns, which continues the commercialisation of Buddhism bemoaned by many critics. Accordingly, the study of *wai phra kao wat* will offer some insights into the various aspects of modern Thai society such as economy, culture, and polity. It can be said that the emergence of *wai phra kao wat* represents a socio-cultural phenomenon in contemporary Thai society.

In this introductory chapter, there are eight topics of discussion. First, I will provide a description of Bangkok, the fieldwork site, from the two viewpoints: the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ayutthaya* is a province in central Thailand. It contains a large number of temples and historical sites as it used to be the capital city of Siam (Thailand nowadays) in Ayutthaya period (1350 – 1767).

topography and the relationship between Bangkokians and social conditions of the city. The evidence will illustrate geography and characteristics of Bangkok population which are grounded as the background of the study. Second, I will identify aims and objectives to address the significance of the study. Third, I will provide methodology that is principally employed in the study. Fourth, I will elaborate my fieldwork experiences to depict how to approach various sources of information in this study. Fifth, I will provide theoretical framework that have focused in this study. Sixth, I will provide ethics of the study that are mainly focused. Seventh, I will review literatures involving rituals, pilgrimage, and tourism to make the contribution of the study of *wai phra kao wat*. Finally, I will provide key definitions that will be applied throughout the study.

## Bangkok

Bangkok also known as *krungthep* (กรุงเทพ) and *krungthep mahanakorn* (กรุงเทพมหานคร) has been the recent capital city of Thailand for over two centuries. It is a 'dual city' (McGee 1967:72) in which an older city is juxtaposed to a newer, commercial city (London 1980:28). Nevertheless, the dual characters have potentially coexisted rather than one dominating the other (McGee 1967:74). Compared to other areas of the country, Bangkok manifests 'the locus of all significant power' (Keyes 1986: 169). It has an overwhelming impact on all sectors of the national development. Moreover, Bangkok is viewed as the spiritual centre of the kingdom; 'comprising the realm of values and beliefs' (London 1980:42). The flux of migrants as well as the diversity of culture in Bangkok is striking and determines continuing changes in relations to capitalism and globalisation. Among the capitalist influence, price and value are driving forces intervening in all forms of social activities including religiosity and cultural practices. Religions and cultures are converted into commodities, as those are considered as a new form of creative economy in capitalism. Religious practices in urban monasteries become apparent within the context of religious commodities, where mundane issues are transformed into the sacred. *Wai phra kao wat* can be viewed as the process by which the social economic market is being utilised religious ideology. The adaptation of *wai phra kao wat* incorporating the process of capitalist system, I argue, continues to raise controversies and arguments in contemporary Thai society.

Following this, I will investigate Bangkok from the two elements: the topography and Bangkok's population, which relate to the background and significance of the study of *wai phra kao wat*.

### Topography

Bangkok was established as the capital city of Siam during the reign of king Rama I on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1782, thereby beginning the current *Rattanakosin* period. Bangkok is situated in the central region of the country and covers 1,568.74 square kilometres. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) administrates the city by ruling the governing system into 50 districts (เขต; *khet*) which are categorised into three main zones; inner city, urban fringe, and suburb zones. The most recent demographic statistics taken in December 2015 <sup>4</sup> show that there are approximately 5,696,409 Bangkokians and 2,753,972 houses. Bangkok is divided into two sides; the western side of the Chao Phraya River called *Thonburi* (ธนบุรี) and the eastern side called *Phranakorn* (พระนคร).

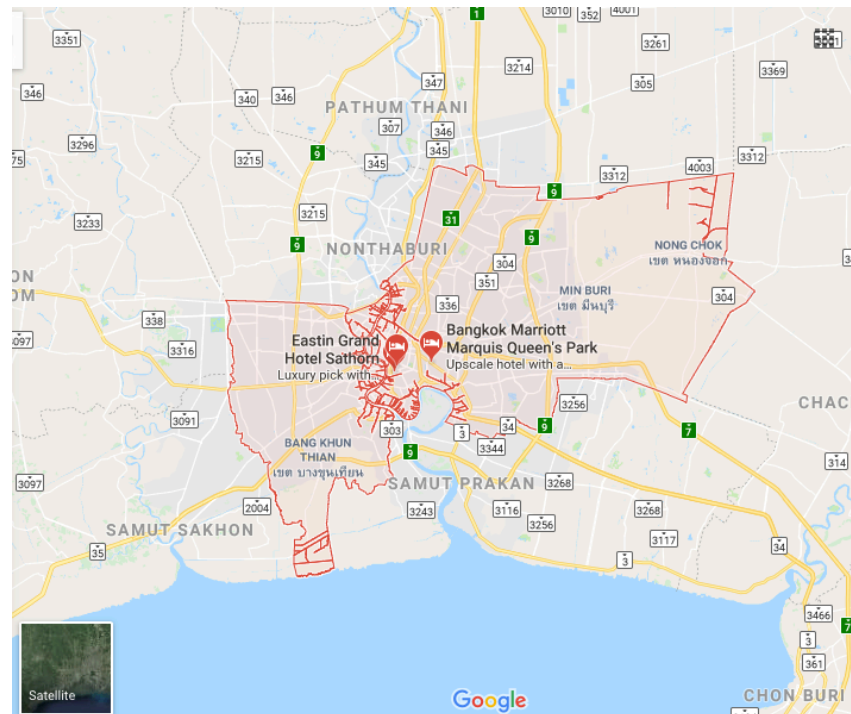


Figure 1.1: Map of Bangkok (source: <https://maps.google.com/>)

<sup>4</sup> <http://203.155.220.230/bmainfo/esp/> by BMA Data Center (Accessed online 07/12/2016)

*Thonburi* consists of 15 districts<sup>5</sup>. Originally, *Thonburi* was the old capital city of Siam (1767 – 1782), preceding the formal foundation of Bangkok (Cuttaleeya and King 2007: 63). King Taksin established Thonburi kingdom after he defeated Burmese troops and ascended the throne. Nevertheless, it lasted only 15 years. In 1782, King Taksin was executed and Chao Phraya Chakri (King Rama I) ascended the throne. Chao Phraya Chakri moved the capital city on the opposite side of *Thonburi* across the Chao Phraya River and named it ‘*Krung Thep*’ (Bangkok) (Yamashita 2017:152). *Thonburi* was later determined as a province during the constitutional revolution in 1932. On December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1971, the revolutionary council declared to merge *Thonburi* and *Phranakorn* provinces into the latest capital city of Thailand. Bangkok continues to be governed by a special provincial administrative organisation.

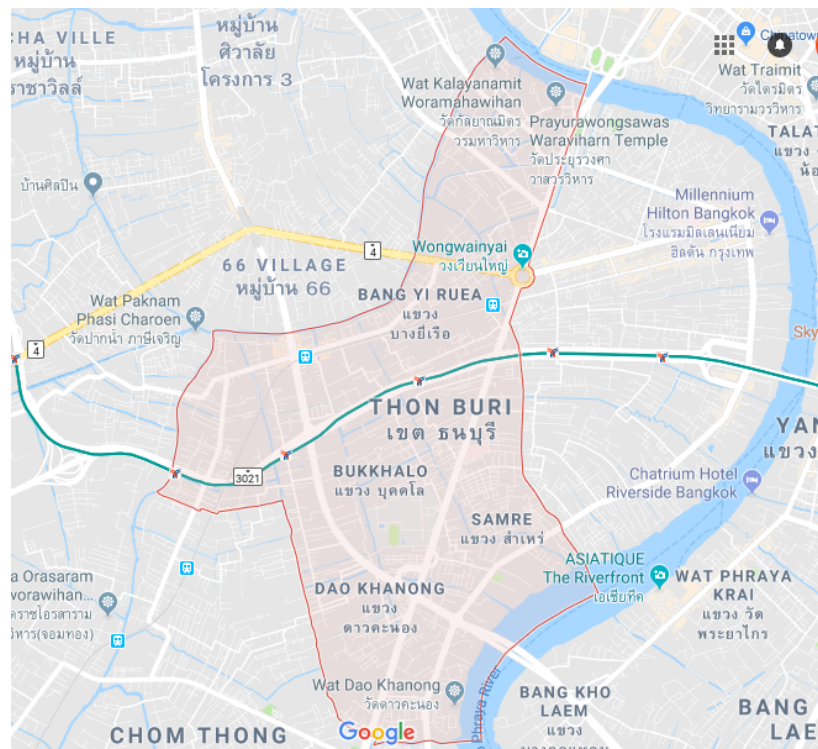


Figure 1.2: Map of Thonburi side (source: <https://maps.google.com/>)

Due to the geographic landscape, village communities<sup>6</sup> in *Thonburi* are likely to be based on the riverine lifestyle rather than in the new expanding urban area of Bangkok.

<sup>5</sup> According to the administrative system by BMA, *Thonburi* region is designated into two zones; North *Thonburi* and South *Thonburi*. Northern *Thonburi* group consists of 7 districts including *Bang Phlat*, *Talingchan*, *Bangkok Noi*, *Bangkok Yai*, *Phasrichareon*, *Nongkaem*, and *Thaweewattana* districts. Meanwhile, southern *Thonburi* group consists of 8 districts including *Bang Khun Thien*, *Bang Born*, *Jorn Thong*, *Ratchaburana*, *Thung Khru*, *Thonburi*, *Klongsarn*, and *Bangkae* districts.

<sup>6</sup> Village community or urban community is administratively known as *Chumchon*; ชุมชน.



For instance, *Thonburi* people (คนฝั่งธน; *khon fang thon*) use the river or *klong* (the little water way; คลอง) for alternative transportation, social interaction, commercial business and recreation (Cuttaleeya and King 2007: 63). The village communities in *Thonburi* are mainly along the *klong* (the little water way; คลอง) and centralised by the temple (วัด; *wat*). The striking picturesque of old Thailand in *Thonburi* nowadays has given rise to the attention of tourists. Many village communities along the river and the *klong* set up their own floating markets, trading local products, and generating income to local communities. The state government also utilises the unique landscape to support the socioeconomic affairs. For example, the government of General Prayuth Chan O-cha organised ‘Pracharat market’ (the state-people market; *talad pracharat*; ตลาดประชารัฐ) at *Klong Phadung Krung Kasem* (the building canal for previous transportation; คลองผดุงกรุงเกษม) to provide opportunities for rural traders to sell their local products in Bangkok. The organisers employed *traditional* Thai lifestyle signals, such as wearing Thai costumes and selling food in the boat, to promote for tourist attraction. After the achievement of this project, Pracharat market has been reorganised in many areas around Bangkok. It was once reorganised in the area of *Phra Chetuphon Wimolmangkalam* temple, one of the main destinations of *wai phra kao wat*, on the 2016 Asalahabucha and Lent days. The sites of *wai phra kao wat* then became the additional financial hub of the country. I will further discuss about the relations between the state-oriented policy and *wai phra kao wat* in chapter 4.



**Figure 1.3: Pracharat Market at Klong Phadung Krung Kasem**  
(source: <http://tourismthailand.org>)



*Phra Nakorn* is the expanse of the urbanised Bangkok (Cuttaleeya and King 2007: 70), which consists of 35 districts<sup>7</sup>. *Phra Nakorn* is a complex landscape which is full of modern architectural buildings such as skyscrapers, department stores, and modern facilities. Meanwhile, the centre of *Phra Nakorn* known as the area of *Rattanakosin* Island (*Kor Rattanakosin*) preserves a variety of ancient temples and historical sites such as The Emerald Buddha temple, Grand Palace, The Royal grand field, and the City Pillar of Bangkok.

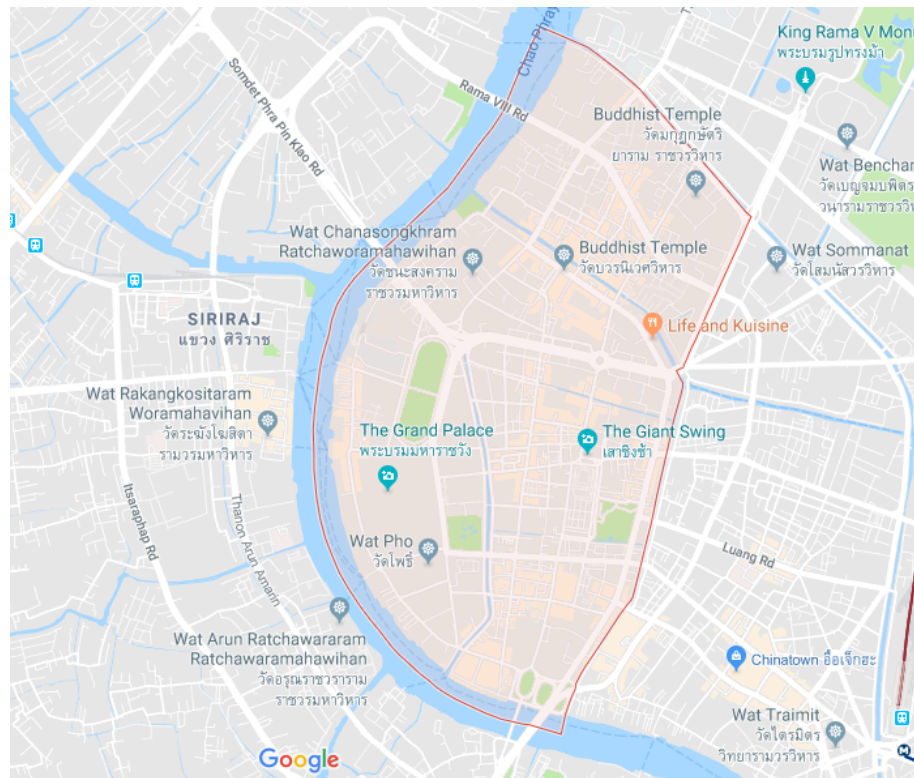


Figure 1.4: Map of Phra Nakorn side (source: <https://maps.google.com/>)

The complex topography, which combines the transition of ‘new’ and ‘old’ identities into the single landscape, contributes to the exceptional characters of Bangkok.

<sup>7</sup> *Phranakorn* region consists of four district groups that are *Rattanakosin*, *Burapha*, *Srinakarin* and *Chao Phraya* groups. *Rattanakosin* group consists of 9 districts including *Bang Sue*, *Dusit*, *Ratchadhevi*, *Phayathai*, *Pathumwan*, *Phranakorn*, *Pomprab Satruphai*, *Samphanthawong*, and *Bang Rak* districts. *Burapha* group consists of 9 districts including *Donmuang*, *Laksi*, *Saimai*, *Bang Khen*, *Chatuchak*, *Ladprao*, *Beung Kum*, *Bang Kapi*, *Wang Thong Lang* districts. *Srinakarin* group consists of 8 districts including *Saphan Soong*, *Meenburi*, *Klongsamwa*, *Nong Chok*, *Ladkrabang*, *Prawet*, *Suanluang*, *Kannayao* districts. Lastly, *Chao Phraya* group consists of 9 districts including *Dindang*, *Hua Kwang*, *Wattana*, *Klong Toey*, *Bang Na*, *Phra Kanong*, *Bang Kor Laem*, *Sathorn*, and *Yannawa* districts.

Since the religious sites were founded at the centre of the country, they have been reinforced with sacred power (Keyes 1986: 172). The sacred centre of Bangkok provides not only the landmarks of the kingdom but also the sense that residents have of being intimate with the sources of sacred power. Meanwhile, successive monarchs built important shrines and many members of the aristocracy and nobility endowed other temples in the vicinities of the sacred centre (Keyes 1986: 172). As such the topography of Bangkok implies that Buddhism becomes ultimately prioritised in the city. Nevertheless, Bangkok has recently been subject to sustain commercialising influences, with temples and sacred sites often implicated. Keyes (1986: 172) argues that many temples have been eclipsed by the commercial worlds. Indeed, in many cases, temples have allowed much of their land to be used for very worldly objectives.

With capitalist consumerism now predominant in Thailand, commercial exploitation has become a controversial issue in every social sphere including the religion. The commodification of Buddhism has been often criticised for the perceived distortion of scriptural doctrines and the highly visible images of inordinately wealthy monks. Scholars branded this problematic situation as ‘the crisis of Thai Buddhism’ (*‘wikrit phra phutta satsana’*; วิกฤติพระพุทธรศาสนา) (Apinya 1993; Ishii 1986; Jackson 1999a, 1999b; Keyes 1975a, 1975b; Nidhi 1999; Pattana 2008; Reynolds 1978; Robert 1995a, 1995b; Sulak 1980, 1995, 2001; Suwanna 1998; Tambiah 1970, 1984). Moreover, some people misinterpret Buddhist values by engaging it with the medium of transaction in the economic system. According to De Bernadi (2008: 49), ‘money is a universal measure of value with no content’. When money becomes the dominant medium of transaction, the merit of religious practices is measured from the resulting quantity of money earned rather than the quality of associated deeds and intentions. When Buddhism has dealt with the ‘money’ issue, it has been commodified with the sacred quality in order to emphasise the social significance of Buddhism in contemporary period.

### *Bangkok’s populations*

According to the World Bank report<sup>8</sup>, the growth of urban population in Bangkok has the ninth largest population in East Asia that accounts for 9.8 million people in 2010.

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2010). *East Asia’s Changing Urban Landscape: Measuring a Decade of Spatial Growth*. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/01/26/urbanization-in-thailand-is-dominated-by-the-bangkok-urban-area> (accessed online April 28, 2018).

The middle class in Thailand is based predominantly in Bangkok and comprises at least one-third of the population of Bangkok (Dick and Rimmer 1998: 2303). They have been particularly influential in recent political history by demanding widespread social changes throughout the country. Norms and lifestyles of Bangkokians also influence social acceptance and satisfaction of the entire society. They are a product of the development and expansion of the capitalist economy in Southeast Asia (Askew 1999:95) and have been noted as extolling class values that are ‘materialistic, practical, and achievement-orientated’ (Girling 1996:43).

As noted, the Bangkok middle classes play a significant role in civil society. Girling (1996:9) argues that the middle class justified ‘the ascendancy of capitalism and the bureaucratic political system in civil society’ as well as forming the understanding of development as ‘the third element in the triangular relationship between economic growth, state power, and civil society’ (Girling 1996:9). The intensive industrialisation and capitalisation predominantly affects the social behaviours and the propriety of the middle class. Also, the rapid growth of the urban middle class has attracted the interest of public authorities who need to court the group in order to dominate force via state legitimacy and political empowerment. The rapid growth of the middle class in Bangkok becomes a ‘key social force’ (Askew 1999:95) behind socio-economic and cultural changes spreading out the entire civil society.

Although the middle-class people are predominantly based on technological and scientific advancement, most of their activities and innovation are still grounded in the religious and cultural ideologies. The significance of religions and cultures remains crucial even when the coercive power of the government is weak (Young 1997: 71). Apart from being the driving force of socioeconomic advancement, the emergence of the middle-class potentially relieves the polarisation between the elite and the peasant that stigmatises in many Thais’ past experiences. Funatsu and Kagoya (2003: 243) argue that Thai middle classes are ‘mixed social origin’. Such a social background then makes for the flexibility in expressing identity beyond received social status. Young (1999:56) argues the middle class in Southeast Asia including Thailand are likely to posit themselves around day-to-day social experiences rather than received social ranking. In Bangkok, all forms of social activities, including religious and cultural, are potential sources of power that shape not only individual satisfaction but also civil society. Many of these activities are based on the middle class’s view and have been adapted to satisfy worldly aspirations within a relatively plastic social order. It is the worldly and

materialistic dimension of this aspiration through religious practices that has prompted criticism of the commodification of religion.

In conclusion, the growing middle class of Bangkok has been considered a vital component of state legitimacy in a fast-changing social environment. The recent government set the policies to deal with the middle-class lifestyle and the radical social and economic changes of the contemporary Thai society. The state's promotion of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok illustrates a new application of religio-cultural practices to deal with rapid socio-economic change. In this respect, *wai phra kao wat* is a way of dealing with modernisation and expanding capitalism. Additionally, the adaptability of *wai phra kao wat* has been approached to solve political crisis and sanctify the establishment of the triad of Nation, Religion and King.

### The aims of the study

*Wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok is an example of the emergence of a particular type of religio-cultural phenomena in contemporary Thai society. Diverse forms of practice have been (re)invented as a form of religious tourism. The actual role of the practice can be considered as a form of *cultural capital* ('*toon tang wattanatham*'; ทุนทางวัฒนธรรม) in a specific economic system in contemporary Thai society. Moreover, this pilgrimage practice has become a site of power negotiation between state, local authorities and Thai citizens. The loose structure of *wai phra kao wat* and the emphasis on solidarity, inclusiveness of sacred power and rhetoric of culture has all added to the prominence of the practice and the acceptance by pilgrims and tourists in contemporary Thailand. Accordingly, I have sought to address the three aims of the study as the following:

- 1) To assess the significance of Buddhism's place within the contemporary Thai social context, with reference to cultural, political, and economic perspectives
- 2) To investigate *wai phra kao wat* as a representative of religio-cultural phenomena in contemporary Thai society
- 3) To illustrate the roles and forms of pilgrimage practice in contemporary Thai society

## The objectives of the study

The study will provide significant insights into *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok including the diversity of the roles and the forms of this practice. Simultaneously, the study will present the relationship between Buddhism and Thai society, particularly in the current context of the emergence of ‘pilgrimage tourism’ and social and religio-cultural changes in contemporary Thai society.

## Methodology

To achieve the aims of the study, I employed a selection of ethnographic methods including participant observation and interviews. Additionally, social mapping as well as visual data was used. In this section, I describe those methods relevant to my study.

Pawluch et al. (2005:231) define ethnography as the study of social groups and of their behaviours and practices in daily lives. Ethnographers then participate in the activities of these groups and apply certain methods to collect data. Study could consist of intensive, non-directive and naturalistic interviewing, participant observation and documentary analysis (Silverman 2010:121), all employed in order to gain intimate experiences with people in the field and collect sufficient suitable data (Pawluch et al. 2005:3).

In this study participant observation was prioritised in order to gain the knowledge necessary for my research. It is essential that social and cultural researchers learn about and inquire into the viewpoints, practices and adjustments of ‘others’ in their setting (Bernard 2006:342). Due to the complexity of such study, ‘lived experiences’ can thus reveal the ‘facts’ of a community’s life (Perry 2002:12-13). Additionally, becoming a participant observer is highly beneficial when seeking to establish rapport with those being studied (Filstead 1970:77; Blum 1970:83; Bernard 2006:344), as it will allow researchers easier access to detailed information.

My fieldwork was mainly located within the fourteen *wai phra kao wat* temples in Bangkok promoted by 2004 TAT and Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture. Additionally, I visited nearby communities to afford myself a different perspective and enable me to broaden my contacts (Trice 1970:78). I prepared the

validated documentary evidence of my position, research information, and the consent form in order to prove my identity and prevent any ethical controversy arising during fieldwork (Bernard 2006:354-356).

At the first time I entered the field, I only observed participants' performance in order to relieve my tension from the unfamiliar place and people and reveal preliminary findings (Silverman 2010:44). Then, I began taking part in 'normal' temple activities, such as worshipping the Buddha's image, making merit, and praying chants, and I talked to informants to obtain their thoughts. Simultaneously, I drew maps of pilgrimage routes to identify the designation of the temples and surrounding areas. I also sought to build rapport with any relevant gatekeepers, such as abbots, monks, nuns and temple workers, as this provided me with more direct and accurate information.

The process of being interviewed can stimulate informants to respond with more detail and further information (Bernard 2006: 217). So, semi-structured interviewing was the principle format employed in my research. It is beneficial for planning schedules (Bernard 2006: 210) and for allowing the informants to free-flow (Totten and Kelly 2005:88). The interview questions were open-ended, with a minimum number linked to specific themes (Bernard 2006: 268). The themes of the questions were as follows: the forms of pilgrimage practice in the nine temples, the role played by the temples, organisations and local communities, the roles of religion in contemporary Thai society (Theravada Buddhism in particular), the existing and shifting forms of pilgrimage in contemporary Thai society and the contemporary popularity of pilgrimage.

I then split my key informants and interviewees into two main groups. The first were the practitioners, merit makers and local leaders who were at the site of the activities. This group provides information from a perspective on the active roles that directly participated in pilgrimage practices. The second group consisted of the authorities responsible for creating such campaigns, such as the Ministry of Tourism and event organisers promoting pilgrimages. This second group provided the background to and origins of such practices, and also supplied me with official feedback relating to economic advantage, social responses and the recognition of the practice. To conclude, I conducted interviews with a well-framed set of questions but developed a more flexible, extended, open-ended style when discussing some controversial topics in order to allow the informants to freely respond and converse on these matters (Wallis 1977:153).

During interviewing I took notes and used an audio-recorder and a camera to store data and check my understanding (Blum 1970:88). However, the necessity and appropriateness of using electronic devices were always considered in individual cases. As Wallis (1977:149) argues, the activities involved are in areas likely to be construed as belonging to a 'private' domain. The privacy of those being studied may be believed to be at risk. Accordingly, the confidentiality of all informants is of the highest importance.

The informants were all fully informed about my research and consented to participate in the study. They also allowed me to contact them via telephone or social network in case I was away from the field. Although some of informants were wary, my presence as a researcher was generally accepted by participants. They gave explicit permission for taking photos and recording videos. When they felt uncomfortable by some questions, I immediately paused the recorder and took written notes instead. I was always strictly concerned about conducting fieldwork and published ethnographical data under the code of practice of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth (The ASA 2011). The security and confidentiality of informants and their data collection was strongly considered at all times.

As a 'native anthropologist', the ethnographical writings were conditioned by life experiences, as well as my academic experiences. I was raised in Bangkok and was rather familiar with the urban Buddhism of the city. Despite being Catholic, I believe in the core values of Buddhism in Thailand. My religion as well as my worldview perspective from studying abroad, however, has been influential when considering *wai phra kao wat* as an outsider in order to approach valid information without bias. As a result, I prioritised the validity of information from the period of conducting fieldwork not from my life experiences. I applied anthropological frameworks and ethnographic methods when I approached data as well as established my research publication.

My gatekeepers were from three main groups as suggestion. I prioritised valid information from two officers from the TAT and the Ministry of Culture as the main organisers, fourteen monks from the fourteen temples where were selected as the temple destinations in Bangkok by TAT and the Department of Religious Affairs as the co-organisers, the two officers from the BMTA and Thai Beverage Company as the main sponsors, and fourteen temples' officers, three tourist agents, a community leader from Arun Ratchawararam temple as experiencing informants of the *wai phra kao wat* practice. All the key informants had experiences about *wai phra kao wat* including the development and the shifting roles of the practice in Bangkok. They also had good

relations with the local community and temples. The group of monks gave me the insight of Buddhist principles and current Buddhist situations. Meanwhile, according to the interviews of ordinary worshippers, they provided me the convincing information from their collaborative experiences. They tended to compare the changes between past and present occurring in the field. The dynamic of Buddhist situations in the present affects Thai Buddhists' beliefs and the Buddhist patronage from the public.

### Fieldwork experiences

The study of *wai phra kao wat* (paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples) in Bangkok, Thailand was conceived, developed and carried out as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for PhD degree in Social Anthropology, Durham University since Michaelmas term 2014. Fieldwork was undertaken for a total twelve months in the second year of the PhD programme (October 2015 – September 2016). However, during summer break 2015 (in June), I had an opportunity to briefly observe the field and participate some activities in the *wai phra kao wat* practice. I also introduced myself and the research project to certain key informants. My fieldwork is mainly based on two official routes organised by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture in 2015 – 2016. The original official route by TAT has been publicly promoted since 2004 and is widely perceived as the most popular route in Bangkok, whereas the latter entitled, '*wai phra kao wat seub siri sawat kao ratchakarn*' ('paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of the nine reigns of *Chakri* dynasty'; ไหว้พระ๑วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์รัชกาล) is a more recent route promoted in 2015 – 2016.

Consequently, there are 14 temples in Bangkok designated as the main destinations of the practice (because four temples are specified in both routes) namely, Arun Ratchawararam temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม), Baworn Niwetvihara temple (วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร), Benjamabophit Dusitwanaram temple (วัดเบญจมบพิตรดุสิตวนาราม), Chanasongkram temple (วัดชนะสงคราม), Chetuphon Wimonmangkararam temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม), Kallayanamitr temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร), Phrasri Rattana Satsadaram temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม), Rakhang Khositaram temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม), Saked Woramahavihara temple (วัดสระเกศวรมหาวิหาร), Suthat Thepwararam temple (วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม), Racha Orasaram temple (วัดราชโอรสาราม),



Racha Pradit Satitmahasimaram temple (วัดราชประดิษฐ์สถิตมหาสีมาราม), Racha Bophit Satitmahasimaram temple (วัดราชบพิธสถิตมหาสีมาราม), and Rama 9 Kanchanaphisek temple (วัดพระรามเก้ากาญจนาภิเษก).

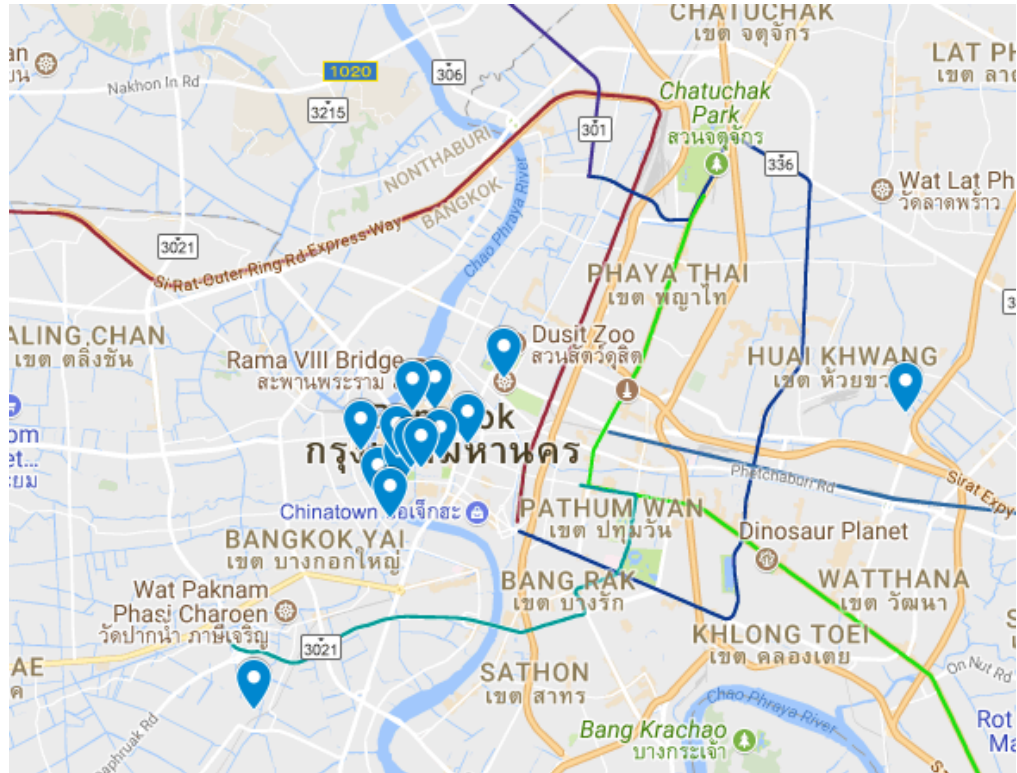


Figure 1.5: fieldwork's destinations (source: <https://maps.google.com/>)

Nevertheless, according to the collective information, there are further temples and sacred places that have been also promoted as the destinations of the *wai phra kao wat* practice in Bangkok. As a result, in order to achieve the most valid evidence, I added this further set of temples and sacred sites into the category of 'additional information'. I spent some time observing these sites that consist of the Bangkokian routes in 2015 – 2016 promoted by Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA), Chao Phraya River Cruise Company, the riverine route by the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture, and the Bangkok Mass Transit System (BTS) skytrain company (Lists of temples are separately provided in chapter 2). Also, the city pillar shrine of Bangkok (*Sarn Lak Muang*; ศาลหลักเมือง), Dragon Temple (*Wat Mangkorn Kamalawas*; วัดมิ่งกรมกลาวาส), and Tiger shrine (*San Chao Phor Seau*; ศาลเจ้าพ่อเสือ) are included.

I mainly employed the technique of participant observation to collect information. I made several short trips to visit and observe the individual sites as, I believed, the information would be beneficial for validating my ethnographic evidences from the major field sites and at the same time afford a greater understanding of *wai phra kao wat* as a socio-cultural phenomenon in contemporary Thai society.

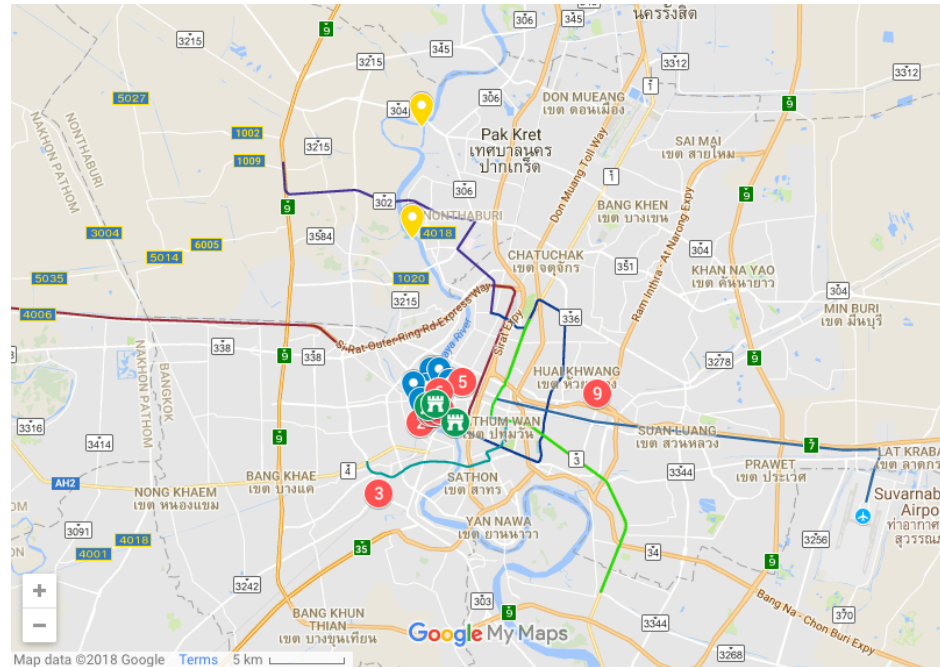


Figure 1.6: Temples and sacred sites promoted in the 2015 – 2016 campaign  
(source: [HTTPS://MAPS.GOOGLE.COM/](https://maps.google.com/))

During the preliminary observation, I found that the most popular periods for participating in *wai phra kao wat* are Buddhist holy weeks and public holidays. I thus set my schedule to observe and interview informants who participated in the practice on the following days: *Makhabucha* week (16 – 22 February), *Vesakhabucha* week (14 – 20 May), and *Asalahabucha* and Lent week (18 – 20 July), New Year festival (31 December– 3 January). Additionally, the state-oriented events also addressed *wai phra kao wat* as a national event on the occasion of the 234<sup>th</sup> Year of Rattanakosin City under Royal Benevolence (20 – 24 April). During these periods, I located myself at the main destination and used the free transporting services provided by BMTA. I aimed to establish a good rapport with informants and obtain consent for in-depth interviews. I also carried out interviews on local Thai festivals like *Songkran* festival (13 – 15 April), King Bhumibhol birthday (5 December) and Queen Sirikit birthday (12 August). Due to the unavailable services for free transportation on these occasions, I located myself at the main destinations to observe participants' behaviours and conducted informal interviews.

During the fieldwork, I sought out 30 informants on each occasion resulting in a total of 150 participants. When I acquired a group of informants, I contacted them individually for in-depth interviews.

According to my preliminary observations, *wai phra kao wat* is considered a spiritual healer in modern Thai society. The practice has been undertaken by individuals for a variety of objectives such as asking for auspiciousness on birthday celebrations, asking for advancement when starting a new business, and asking to warding off bad luck relating to the Chinese calendric year (*kae pee chong*; แก้วปีชง). Accordingly, I further set my schedule on weekends, which are the most popular period for individual participants to focus on this particular group. Meanwhile, the rest of fieldwork period was divided into the other two. One was spent for in-depth interviews with key informants in the positions of public organisers and sponsors such as the officers of TAT and the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture, temple officers, BMTA, Chao Phraya River Cruise Company, and Thai Beverage Public Company Limited. Initially, I contacted them via email and phones to seek out the connection. Then, I sent them the brief description of the study and the consent form for the approval. The other was spent with collecting publications and materials in libraries and media network.

Interestingly, when I travelled to the field, I noticed that some temples located close to the official routes had never been chosen for inclusion in this campaign. With my curiosity, I dropped by these temples to inquire monks and officers for the reasons and opinions about *wai phra kao wat* from a non-participating perspective. Wright and Johnson (1975: 267) noted, ‘in certain conditions of material plenty, complex exchange, and conflict, such the systems (a third level of information processing corrects and coordinates lower level decisions) are advantageous’. Then, I realised the significance of the information from non-participants of the practice. It would be beneficial for validating the significance and actual impacts of *wai phra kao wat*. Following this, I provide the detail description of monthly schedules involving the process of fieldwork conduct and ethnological experiences.

In June 2015, the initial period of conducting fieldwork, I started investigating the 2004 TAT route. I observed the nine temples’ settings and mapped out the route. At first, when I visited individual temples, I mainly employed the means of participant observation. I walked around the temple as well as noticed promoting activities and participants’ performances. After that I established a rapport with temple’s officers by

briefly introducing my research study and asking for consent. Monks and temples' officers are key informants as they are main organisers of the campaign and also have experiences about changes and development of the practice. Apart from this, I searched for the connections to the public organisers including TAT's officers and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs' officers. The monks and temples' officers provided me in-person contacts to the head of organisers.

In October – November 2015, when I received approval from the two public authorities, I began conducting interview with Mr. Amnaj Suttachai, the TAT officer and Mrs. Srinuan Lapkitaro, the director of moral and ethical development, the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture. Both of them are the head organisers of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok 2015 – 2016. At that time, I was allowed to attend the meeting of the Religious Affairs Department for the preparation and the promotion of *wai phra kao wat* during the 2016 New Year festival. After the meeting, Mrs. Srinuan provided me the contacts with tourist companies that were authorised as private organisers of *wai phra kao wat* for international tourists especially from China. They offered the practice as a form of religious tourism. After I initially observed the two routes of *wai phra kao wat*, 14 temples were specified as the main destinations in this study.

In December 2015 – January 2016, I carried out fieldwork on the route of Ministry of Culture. I imitated the same process as the previous conduct with the 2004 TAT route: I explored the settings of the nine temples then mapped out the route destination and participated in the activities provided in each temple. Moreover, I asked for the consent from monks and officers to interview and take photos in the temples' area. Interestingly, there were a variety of special activities promoted in the individual temples on the occasion of New Year festival 2016. Participants were overcrowded which made interviewing difficult. So, I mainly employed participating observation and short interview techniques for the informants. I also asked them the consent to make in-depth interview later.

In February – May 2016, I regularly participated *wai phra kao wat* by TAT and the Ministry of Culture routes on weekends. I mainly focused on the individual informants and I also wanted to establish good relations with gatekeepers. I made in-depth interviews with 30 informants who participated *wai phra kao wat* on their individual purposes, each lasting about 30 minutes to an hour. Also, I employed semi-structured interview with the gatekeepers including abbots, monks, nuns (แม่ชี; *mae chee*) and temple officers because

I had more opportunities to meet and talk to them. These interviews lasted about 15 – 30 minutes for each interview and most of the questions were contributed from their answers.

In April 2016, I participated in a one-day *wai phra kao wat* tour organised by private companies Chao Phraya Cruise and *Sook Sun* tour. So, I had opportunities to meet tour leaders and tourists. I introduced my research and asked for the consent to interview them. I employed semi-structured interview to broaden the shared experiences and opinions about the activity. During May – June 2016, I contacted sponsoring companies such as Thai Beverage Public Company Limited that facilitated tents, chairs, and bottle water for participants in the nine temples of the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture, the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (the BMTA) that facilitated free bus services for *wai phra kao wat* participants, and Advanced Info Services Public Company Limited (AIS), the mobile operator of Thailand, that promoted *wai phra kao wat* as a special promotion for celebrating birthdays of loyal customers. I contacted them and sent the sponsors the research's description and the consent form. When I got the approval, I conducted in-depth interview with them about sponsorship and feedback from the practice.

In June – September 2016, which was the last part of my fieldwork. I accumulated all sources of raw materials and categorised data to see loopholes or missing evidence. I also searched relevant materials of *wai phra kao wat* such as literatures, newspapers, articles, and website information at local libraries and universities. Also, I went to the 2 temples in Nonthaburi and the 3 sacred sites in which were once promoted as the destination of *wai phra kao wat*. I mainly employed the method of observing participant to observe participants' behaviours and performing activities at the individual sites. Also, I briefly discussed with officers and some participants to see their reaction and opinions about the *wai phra kao wat* practice. At this time, I used private transportations such as *tuk-tuk* and taxi for travelling. As I observed the characters and reaction of the drivers, most of them distinctively posited themselves as tour leaders. They often introduced the significance of each temple before we arrived with confidence. They also recommended the activities, the destinations, and how to suitably practice *wai phra kao wat* to passengers. They were also enjoyed listening to passengers' experiences, particularly those of a mysterious nature of *wai phra kao wat* practice.

By analysing qualitative data collected from conducting fieldwork of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok 2015 – 2016, my informants are derived from three groups categorised by the positions in the practice which are participants, organisers and

sponsors. The first group is participants who are tourists, visitors, and pilgrims. There are three generations of the participants: young adults (15 – 25 years old), adults (26 – 59 years old), and seniors (over 60 years old) respectively. It is noticeable that young adults preferred going with friends or classmates of the same age. They spent their weekends or after the class participating in *wai phra kao wat* by using public transportation. Meanwhile, the adults and seniors preferred to participate in family trips on weekends or special occasions such as a family member's birthday. Some travelled by their private cars whereas others especially who live outside Bangkok preferred travelling by private transportations like taxi and *tuk-tuk*. In some cases, participants bought tourist packages from tourist companies or rented vans for convenience and senior health problems. The second group are organisers. I identified them as the key informants because their information and evident are valid and acknowledged. Most of them are officers of TAT and the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture, or else temples' officers, monks, and nuns. The last group are sponsors and participants of *wai phra kao wat*. Again, *wai phra kao wat* nowadays has become a mass tourist activity in contemporary Thai society. The features of the practice are variable as they have been consistently developed, re-created, interpreted and re-interpreted to serve different purposes within the social context. Consequently, ethnographic data and material evidences collecting from the field are prioritised to investigate the roles and dynamic of *wai phra kao wat* in contemporary Thai society.

## Ethics

The study is conducted under the code of practice of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (The ASA 2011). The study was carried out in Bangkok, Thailand from July 2015 to September 2016.

In terms of the applied methods, I made my informants aware of my position when conducting fieldwork. Doing this meant that when I observed and participated in pilgrimage practices in order to convey the locations and understand the common activities, I simultaneously built up rapport with the relevant gatekeepers. These included monks, nuns (*mae chii*) and temple workers, who were made aware of my research project and aims. After I introduced myself to gatekeepers I briefly described my project, asked for their consent and assured them of full participant confidentiality and safety. I also

provided written consent forms and information sheets (both in English and Thai). I mainly employed these for the officials and the key informants.

Additionally, I observed participants, such as pilgrims and tourists, at the sites being studied but due to the scale of the events being held (The ASA 2011) it was impossible to approach every participant. Accordingly, when I photographed someone I'd observed, I verbally asked for permission and noted their name and contact details. During interviews I took notes and used an audio-recording device for data gathering and checking my understanding. The field notes and visual data were kept confidential at all times and the anonymity of subjects maintained throughout.

In terms of security, all collected data was kept in a safe place. My notes and electronic data were stored separately to reduce the risk of my informants being identified or linked with specific comments. I created password-lock or shut down my computer when it is not in use. When I backed-up data, I stored the copies separately in a secure location, such as a safe. I never distributed documents in electronic form due to the risk of hacking. Instead, in my notes I used abbreviations, acronyms and symbols known only to me. After the research is published I will delete any files that my informants require me to.

## Literature review

In this section, the literatures regarding on the three representative characters of *wai phra kao wat* namely, ritual, pilgrimage and tourism are discussed. The three components are inextricably linked to the significance of the study of *wai phra kao wat*.

### Rituals

Historically, ritual was viewed as a 'discrete phenomenon' by social investigators. It was defined as 'a particular hegemony' in the Western academic world (Bell 2009: 6). Nevertheless, the construction of ritual is intrinsically coherent with the discourses of religion, culture, and society. Raj and Morpeth (2007: 1) argue that rituals, rites, and religious practices are designed for people who believe in tradition and faiths like spiritual power, deities, demons, and heavenly beings. The portrayal of ritual represents both individual and social perceptions and behaviours. Meanwhile, the ritual is composed of a sense of belief (Shils 1968) which is individually intrinsic, habitual, and obsessive. Turner (1969) stresses that ritual is perceived as an 'event with social functions'. The

exploration of ritual from actions and values provides ‘the means by which individual perception and behaviours are socially appropriated and conditioned’ (Bell 2009: 20). Bell (2009: 16) convincingly argues that the ritual socially manifests the integration, the appropriateness and the transformation. When ritual is developed in the context of social activities, the mediation between individuality and sociality of ritual reveals the trace of the cultural root and intrinsic power of belief. I therefore wholeheartedly endorse what Bell (2009: 7) calls ritual as a ‘key of culture’ (Bell 2009: 7). Geertz (1966) reveals the correlation between ritual and religion. He argues that ritual performance is depicted as the explanation of ‘meaning’ in cultural phenomena. Since ritual integrated thought and action, the religion has fused conceptions and dispositions of ritual expressions into religious symbols (Bell 2009: 27). The investigation of ritual underlies the interpretive model of intrinsic beliefs and dispositions of human in broadening social contexts. The studies of Bell, Turner, and Geertz make me contend that rituals are intrinsically related to the root of religions. Their claim shed light on the enchantment of rituals in charge of the dominant power over the religious performances.

Studies of Thai rituals have traditionally focused heavily on the roles and forms of these practices within the socio-cultural context as a means of examining the identities of individual groups. Ethnographic strategy has been prioritised in the collection and analysis of empirical data. The Buddhist and ritual practices of the country’s indigenous people and all its ethnic groups have been carefully examined in order to fully understand the relationship between Buddhism and Thais in general. There are few studies about urban rituals even though they are allowed to demonstrate inculcated dispositions of Thais and the hidden authority of the dominant group via their emerging roles and application. I therefore decide to further investigate *wai phra kao wat* on these relevant issues.

According to Tambiah (1970: 1), ‘a Thai village is not an island itself; it is part of a wider network of social relationships and it is embedded in a civilisation’. His fieldwork was conducted at *Baan Phraa Muan*, a village in the northeastern province of *Udon Thani*, and sought to elucidate the synchronic relationship of Buddhism with Thai people by exemplifying spiritual cults and ritual activities in two dimensions: the ordered religious scheme and the dialectical relationship of local myths with the grand Buddhist literature (Tambiah 1970: 2-3). I agree that the synchronic relationship of Thai Buddhism, a point that needs emphasising since the dialect and locality were exposed in Thai Buddhism. However, the radical changes from modernity and capitalism go beyond the syncretic framework. The subtle degrees of technological advancement and social complexity recently have overwhelmed the significance of what is called ‘Buddhism’ in



contemporary Thai society. The study of *wai phra kao wat* therefore will further investigate on these issues in order to manifest the coexistence of Buddhism in contemporary context.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 177) convincingly argues that one of the important roles attributed to religious rituals is their maintenance of social cohesion and equilibrium. The actual process of a practice integrates a group of people and standardises them into in-group beings (Rao 2006: 145). Radcliffe-Brown's argument is extremely beneficial for my study because it highlights the effective way to approach the emerging role of the Buddhist practice especially in times of social crisis. Keyes (1975) studies the relations of Buddhist pilgrimage centres and the twelve-year cycle in Northern Thailand which is based on the local religious tradition called '*wai phra that cata pi koet*' (The reverence of Buddhist relics based on year of birth; ไหว้พระธาตุชะตาปีเกิด). The study manifests the formulation of the twelve pilgrimage centres articulated with the political topography of traditional northern Thailand. Moreover, it reveals the negotiating power with the central authority of Siam in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Pruess 1971: 89). Tianchai (2002) argued that the tradition of the *Lanna*<sup>9</sup> people of revering Buddha's relics in their stūpa employed symbolic functions in order to legitimate the rights and power of the ruling class in the Theravada state, and also as a representation of local identity and of resistance against Siamese influence. Likewise, Pathom (2005) focused his study on the structure and content of the ninety-six stories told by the *Tai*<sup>10</sup> people concerning the Buddha's relics. These myths are associated with *Tai* rituals, and disclose the various integrating processes and the development of the relationship of the religious system of the Buddhist *Tai* people with their indigenous beliefs to maintain their group identity and to generate perceptions of others. Beyond this, the dynamism of religious practices in contemporary Thai society also makes the investigation of urban pilgrimages and ritual activities, and of the full range of their forms and complexity, essential if we are to begin to understand contemporary Thai religious practices and the cultural ties connecting them to wider society.

The academic study of rituals through analysing the roles involved tends to be more complex when their dynamic is based on a process of social change (Kreinath et al. 2006: xiv). In an age of scientific advancement, rationality and logical human thought, magical rituals remain paradoxically pervasive (Nammon 2010). Due to a preference for

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<sup>9</sup> The term refers to a kingdom centred in present-day Northern Thailand from the 13<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>10</sup> The term refers to an ethnic group in north Thailand.

flexibility and privacy, certain forms of contemporary religious practice have been transferred from the public to the private sphere through a process of ‘secularisation’ (Linguist and Handelman 2011: 11). Tambiah (1985: 97), for example, concentrates on a Thai cult called ‘*Gae Kam*’ (dispelling karma) which is used as a form of treatment. He argued that Thais employ the cult to relieve ailments because the practice goes beyond the cosmological scheme and is considered more ‘real’ and ‘enduring’ than the sensations, pains and ordeals of ‘this-worldly’ events (Tambiah 1985:88). Similarly, in the context of the sacred geography of fertility, Whittaker (2012) studies the cult of childless Thai women who pray for a child. She argues that this commitment to religious continuity in the modern world still plays a significant role in approaches to fertility problems in Thailand (Whittaker 2012:3). This trend within contemporary Buddhist practice tends to focus on the practicalities of everyday life problems, such as illness and infertility. Many devotees concentrate on reciprocity, that is, on what they might gain from their faith. This perception creates a dilemma of appropriateness of making merit for modern Thai pilgrims.

Capitalism revived an interest in the supernatural and the occult that stimulated the creative development of Buddhist practices, imbuing them with a much clearer and compelling social role for lay practitioners. The re-enchantment of supernatural and rituals predisposed to the authority of Buddhism for example has become an integral element of the ‘invented’ Buddhist practices. It has been adopted to interact with the multidimensionality of social, economic, and political aspects of contemporary Thailand. Consequently, more optimistically, adaptability and modernisation is imperative to sustain the coexistence of traditional Buddhism in responding to the emergence of contemporary Thai society.

Cultural capital not only includes Buddhist practices and rituals but also extends to sacred objects. Sukanya (2013: 82) interestingly explains that these forms of cultural capital are comprised of five sacred elements, namely belief in the ‘holiness’ of the sacred objects, faith in their creators, the beliefs and rituals that are involved, the rituals that are used and the legends and stories concerning the sacred objects. However, the diversity of the embodied cultural elements, including folktales and beliefs, has both increased and decreased the value of the same sacred objects (Sukanya 2013: 78). Regarding the sacred value of ritual activity, Jackson (1999: 5) positions *Luang Phor*<sup>11</sup> *Khoon* as a phenomenon of ritual activity within capitalist production, portraying him as a national cult figure

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<sup>11</sup> The term *Luang Phor* refers to a Reverend father.

situated at the centre of a 'prosperity religion' (Jackson 1999; Wilson 2008: 631). The reputation of Khoon's miraculously empowered amulets has helped create this position of influence, and also symbolically represents the 'occult money' economy that gains from such ritual enterprise and from changing patterns of religious consumption in Thai society (Jackson 1999: 55; Pattana 2013: 133). This phenomenon in contemporary Thailand therefore represents a modern dilemma, namely the conflict between the destructive capacity of capitalism and the dynamism of cultural adaptability. Moreover, as the semiotic activities of the believers and commercial exploiters have become increasingly pervasive, the same phenomenon has also become associated with the notion of power; I decide to further discuss the theoretical approach to this in the next section.

The commodification of rituals and Buddhist practices can be seen as the formation of cultural capital as part of the creative economy (Ghelfi 2005). However, this issue has become controversial due to the overlapping of such cultural commodities with the 'conventional' commercial economy in Thailand (Whittaker 2012: 8). A recent study of *Phayanag*'s (the Naga) myths has shown how long-lasting legends with unknown origins of *Phayanag* are capable of accumulating multi-dimensional economic and cultural values which attract tourists and believers (Poldham 2008). Such collections of 'inventive' tales can add value to cultural capital when they are integrated into various economic sectors, tourism in particular, by presenting the recounting of these local narratives as a pastime, as an imitation of a real past and as an imaginative invention of past life (Aphilak 2013: 105).

The cultural entanglement can be understood as a 'busy intersection' to which positioned subjects bring concerns, dilemmas and emotions arising from particular life trajectories, and from which these individuals emerge with differing experiences (Rosaldo 1993: 17). The extent to which the roles and impact of Buddhist practices in contemporary Thailand are being transformed into commodities by capitalism and globalism is truly remarkable. This makes an investigation of the factors relating to both individual and institutional ritual activities in contemporary Thailand, and of their impact, essential. Such an investigation therefore can contribute towards providing insights into the cultural circumstances of contemporary Thai society.

### *Pilgrimage and religious tourism*

'Travelling with a religious purpose' is the key issue of pilgrimage and religious tourism. Pilgrimage illustrates the human desire in search of the meaning of life which is

embedded in the religious epitome. Pilgrims choose to leave their daily routines and make a sacred voyage. When the journey is interwoven with religious purpose, the pilgrimage practice becomes interesting not only pilgrims and religious persons but also tourists and travellers. Although scholars attempt to differentiate between pilgrimage and tourism at the beginning of their studies, the interweaving characters between pilgrimage and tourism as well as the complicated identities between pilgrims and tourists make such differentiation impossible. However, the pilgrimage's elements and their performance in social context are worth studying. The complex nature of pilgrimage and tourism together with the interaction of 'old' and 'new' activities suggests not only the dynamic of the religious phenomenon but also a significant social phenomenon in human society.

I organise this section into two sub themes. First, I introduce the development of pilgrimage and the theoretical relevance that is employed to investigate the pilgrimage practices. Secondly, I investigate the studies of religious tourism in the modern period. The reviewing of these studies will give an overview of the ongoing research on pilgrimage and religious tourism in contemporary society.

### *Pilgrimage*

Classically, pilgrimage is approached from a religious perspective as a method in search of meanings of life. Pilgrims and practitioners choose to leave routines and make a sacred voyage for self-renewal and purpose. When the sacredness of pilgrimage is embedded with arduous journeys, it becomes a challenge for participants. The objectives of the practice are then not only to fulfill mental force but also to apply physical strength and endurance. The early period of pilgrimage studies during the end of twentieth century were too narrow and restricted to the two principal issues namely the characteristics of the constitution of pilgrimage and the assessment of motivation of the practice (Hinnells 1984; Sherratt and Hawkins 1972). Later, Blackwell (2007) proposed the theory of motivation of pilgrimage. He surveyed the sacred sites popular with most pilgrims. He found that the distinction between pilgrim and tourist is rarely clear because the network of pilgrimage consolidates natural and cultural significances which are parallel in both natural and supernatural world. These characteristics are convincing for both pilgrims and tourists. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of pilgrimage occurs in the interpretative process. For example, some pilgrims and practitioners strive to experience suffering and difficulties in order to achieve spiritual renewal whereas others are drawn to attractive

scenarios and landscapes along the journey (Singh 2004). If pilgrimage destinations are attractive and grandiose or located in a secular area, they may also be attractive to tourists. The complex characters of pilgrimage and tourism are no longer identifiable. Instead, scholars turn to focus on the social engagement of the practice. Collins-Kreiner (2010: 441) argues the spatial movement has impact on the interaction between pilgrim-tourists and local people. As such the movement affects destinations and local communities nearby because the mobility of a large number of pilgrim-tourists generates the source of power in terms of socio-cultural and economic exploitation. Accordingly, the pilgrimage studies in the early period provide the contingent roles of religions and spirituality from the corporeal to the geographical and institutional relevance (Holloway and Valins 2002: 5 – 9).

Early studies of pilgrimage focused on two principal issues: the characteristics of individual elements of pilgrimage and pilgrimage as a social process. First, pilgrimage was approached from individual features such as informants, places, and practice involved. Scholars (Blackwell 2007; Singh 2004) attempted to define characters of pilgrims and assess their motivations in undertaking the practice. For instance, Blackwell (2007) pursues the theories of motivation by surveying sacred sites that were recognised as pilgrimage destinations. The study found that some pilgrims went to sacred sites with no religious intention, preferring to call themselves ‘travellers’. The distinction between pilgrims and tourists was rarely determined because the combination of natural and cultural landscape of almost every pilgrimage site is invariably imbued with a sense of pleasure for both pilgrims and tourists. Meanwhile, whether worldly or otherworldly objectives grounded pilgrimage practice were unidentified. The emergence of famous religious sites in the nineteenth century such as Mecca in Saudi Arabia and Temple Mount in Jerusalem attracted scholars to observe sacred elements of pilgrimage sites and pilgrimage motivation (Badone and Sharon 2004; Raj and Morpeth 2007: 3). Pilgrimage sites are mostly in confined areas (Raj and Morpeth 2007: 9) but are fertile with cultural and historical values. ‘The landscape of pilgrimage consists of much more than extraordinary geography and architecture. It is a landscape of memory, myth and tradition in which monuments play as much a symbolic as an actual role’ (Coleman and Elsner 1995:48).

Pilgrimage was previously considered a ritual activity. The practice then applied in the world religions that began in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Coleman and Elsner 1995: 29). Barber (1991: 2) notes, ‘pilgrimage is a modern replacement for the ancient rites of tribal initiation, where the individual is first separated from the tribe, then placed

in a kind of marginal state, either by living away from the tribe or under a totally different set of rules, and finally reintegrated into society in his new status'. The mobility has shifted both pilgrims and landscape. The former has encountered spiritual renewal and new identity within social context (Blackwell 2007: 38; Singh 2004). The latter has provided 'sacred' embodiment that reinforces spatial significance. The complex network of pilgrimage provides opportunities to rectify pilgrims' living matters and social situations due to the 'holy' and 'sacred' implication of the practice.

The mobility embedded in pilgrimage also relates to the notions of liminality and *communitas*, the originally theoretical frameworks focusing on pilgrimage. Turner (1969) originally proposed and employed these theories to interpret pilgrimage. Liminality describes the condition of ritual participants who have symbolically exited one social 'space' or state but have not entered a new one: they are figuratively poised over the threshold, or 'betwixt and between,' the two social worlds (Turner 1969: 107). The liminal capacity can generate *communitas*, a relational quality of full - unmediated communication, even communion with other individuals, which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship (Turner 1978: 250). The *communitas* develops in the interstices of social structure among the groups of people that consciously remove themselves from some of the constraints of society whereas liminality in the religious system is found in the 'historical' or 'salvation' religions. Dubisch (1995: 97) applied the theory to investigate the Greek Orthodox shrine of the church of the Annunciation of the Aegean island of Tinos. He found that liminality is not an inherent feature of pilgrimage in Tinos. But, the practice is variable, fluid, and situational that is suited for the establishment of spiritual *communitas*. When pilgrimage considered as a liminal phenomenon leads pilgrims to leave daily routines and escape social restriction, it simultaneously provides a sense of unification that minimises local differences, decreases contesting identities, and produces mystical nationalism (Yueh-po 2017: 284). The unifying process also creates spiritual *communitas* to establish sustaining development. Similarly, although a rigid dichotomy between religion and tourism is distinctive, the two polemic terms occupy a liminal position representing from religious activities and ritual performances.

The destinations of pilgrimage are composed of two oppositional characters. For one thing, the pilgrimage sites are mostly in confined or secular areas (Raj and Morpeth 2007: 9) but it is a space of cultural fertility embedded with value. For another thing, 'religious spaces' like a shrine, sanctuary, and cathedral are situated at the centre of communities. The vicinities of temples are likely to be exploited to serve social purposes.

The potential benefits embedded in the religious spaces encourage people to argue and question the impacts of the practice affecting the destination (Hitchcock 1993: 26; Raj and Morpeth 2007: 6). An example case study by Rotheram (2007) suggests churches in the United Kingdom are used to serve the complex roles in a wider community such as a provider of spiritual experience and moral guidance and a curator and custodian of unique heritage significance. Parallel to the complexity of the sphere, the definitions of participants between pilgrims and tourists are also questioned. Cohen (1974: 541) argues that tourism is a modern form of pilgrimage. So, pilgrims are tourists, meanwhile tourists are pilgrims.

Approaching from social perspective, when the value attachment in confined or secular sites of pilgrimage is exposed, the utility of religious space is varied to serve both religious and aesthetic purposes. Whenever the religious spaces use for commercialising purposes, moral criticism is likely to arise. (Hitchcock 1993: 26; Raj and Morpeth 2007: 6). For instance, Rotheram (2007) suggests church sphere provides the complex roles in mass community such as a provider of spiritual experience and moral guidance and a curator and custodian of unique heritage significance. The complexity of sacred space is acknowledged in mutual benefits for both landlords and visitors. The complexity of the space of the temple has been transformed by engaging with capitalism and industrialisation. Meanwhile, many Thai temples allocate area as religious market to sell amulets, sacred objects, and even souvenirs. The conversion of religious symbols, rites and places into marketable commodities results in a blurring of the boundary between sites of worship and market places (Jackson 2016:837).

According to the Thai definition of pilgrimage, the concept of pilgrimage denotes in Thai as *kānpainamatsakān* (going forth to bow the head in veneration; การไปนมัสการ) and *kānpaisawaengbun* (going forth in search of merit; การไปแสวงบุญ) (Pruess 1971: 172). Anuman Rajadhon and Pruess emphasise that pilgrimage in Thailand is a journey designated to serve for both religious and entertaining purposes. These dual characters of pilgrims and tourists in Thailand are inextricably linked. Pilgrimage in Thai meaning conveys the movement in order to worship and acquire merit especially at sacred sites. Considering pilgrimage as a merit seeking practice, the religious action provides the access to merit that is believed to be in temples, shrines, and sacred places. Thai Buddhists who are on merit seeking journey however do not make a distinction between ‘journey of piety’ and ‘journey of pleasure’ (Pruess 1971: 191) as Anuman Rajadhon (1961: 96) referred pilgrimage as ‘a vacation of a semi-religious nature’. I contend that the

interweaving of merit seeking and travelling purposes of pilgrimage is firmly established in Thai perception.

According to the series of pilgrimage and religious tourism in Thailand, the religious practices have been grounded with traditional magical rituals and supernaturalism that were once suppressed and neglect from the centre of national religious practice. In contrast, the recent of religious practices, even with the state-sponsored Buddhism expose the resurgence of interest of superstitions and magical rituals as intrinsic character of the religious practices. Particularly, they are increasingly obvious when the society tends to be uncertain and chaotic as it once occurred during the early twenty-first century, the emergence of economic and political crisis in Thailand (Pattana 2013: 83). Nevertheless, the profusion of sacred combination in Buddhism does not substitute the central Buddhism as the core institution of Thai society (Muad 2007: 104). Supernaturalisation and sacrality provide a mere 'paradox in the diversification of religious forms in contemporary Thailand' (Jackson 2016: 871).

Pilgrimage studies in Thailand are investigated from distinctive characters of particular sites together with specific roles in the social context. The sacred quality and mythical beliefs provide the identity of individual sites. Pilgrimage in Thai society was originally held in sacred sites in rural areas where is far from the central manipulation. Nevertheless, it provides the legitimacy of specific groups by associating with local beliefs in the particular regions. For example, Pruess (1971) studies Buddhist pilgrimage in Northeastern Thailand. The pilgrimage sites are mentioned as 'reminders' and memorial marking events of the Buddha's life (Pruess 1971: 176). The reference of myths about the presence of Buddha during his lifetime is always employed. Pruess (1971: 204) also argues the establishment of new sacred places and journeys to older sites will remain a part of religious life in Thailand as long as the meritorious virtues and socially-relevant display are prioritised in Thai perception.

The discrepancies and boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism together with the dual characters of pilgrim and tourist have been blurred when Turner and Turner (1978: 20) argued 'a tourist is half a pilgrim if a pilgrim is half a tourist'. I found that Thai scholars never have an attempt to differentiate specific characters of between pilgrim and tourist. Thai pilgrims are therefore understood to be pilgrim-tourist. Consequently, it seems no longer tenable to separate between pilgrimage and tourism or even pilgrims and tourists in the world of postmodern travel (Badone and Sharon 2004:2) because the perennial problems in ethnography are the difficulties of attaining clear insight into motivations and inner experiences of others (Badone and Sharon 2004:2). Postmodernism



provides an optional and complementary approach to explaining the shifting boundaries instead (Collins-Kreiner 2010:441).

The complex characters of pilgrimage potentially transform it into a kind of modern tourism. Pilgrimage tourism serves as a form of cultural capital that generates income for the local and national community. However, the emergence of the socioeconomic role of the pilgrimage often creates conflict due to concerns about religious exploitation as the social benefits of pilgrimage and religious tourism turn to be a political strategy to promote national identity as well as to create a positive image of the governor. Again, due to the significance of religion and tourism and the expansion of socio-economic and cultural relevance, the emergence of tourism in modern Thai society is high demanding for academic studies (King 2015: 505). Cohen and Cohen (2012: 2180) drew attention to the dynamic processes in a globalising world: the increasing pace of changes; time-space compression; saturation of information and images; the fragmentation of lifestyles. It is necessary for individual and public levels to reconsider insightful information of pilgrimage and religious tourism so as to clarify the understanding of social circumstances in times of rapid changes and uncertainty.

This fluidity means that it is difficult to distinguish between pilgrimage and tourism. The cliché used by Turner and Turner (1978: 20), ‘a tourist is half a pilgrim, if pilgrim its half a tourist’ illustrates the combining characters of pilgrim and tourist are no longer tenable to separate specific characters between pilgrim and tourist. The mobility of pilgrim-tourist becomes the central point of pilgrimage that simultaneously mobilises the structure and features of sacred travel from the past to manifest in a form of modern tourism in the postmodern period (Coleman and Elsner 1995: 206). *Wai phra kao wat* conveys the multidimensionality of popular culture in the development of Buddhism and the practices of traditionally recognised Buddhists. *Wai phra kao wat* can be considered a post-modern Buddhist pilgrimage in contemporary Thailand. The practice has been converted into new versions such as tourism, film and online game in accordance with modernisation and the growth of capitalism. The practice encompasses traditional Buddhism, modern tourism, and culture and interacts with more complex issues such as political conflicts, economic development and national identity. Pilgrimage in popular culture then provides a driving force that reflects and shapes values of religions in contemporary society. I therefore decided to use the term religious tourism to characterise the significant changes of *wai phra kao wat*.

### *Religious Tourism*

Religious tourism is perceived as a modern civilisational form of pilgrimage. Many scholars argue that individual and social identities within the context of religious tourism are dynamic, fluid, and are negotiable and changing depending on people's circumstances, context, and place (Bauman 1996; Morgan and Pritchard 2005; Tilley 2006; Olsen 2010:850). Religious tourism is investigated from 'the process of place-making and the intersection between local communities' religious practice and identity with regional, national, and global forces, which calls for a more comprehensive study of this religious practice' (Yueh-po 2017:285). As tourism is considered a modern variety of the traditional pilgrimage, the challenging issues in linking religion/ tourism, pilgrim/ tourist and even sacred/ secular places in the contemporary context are examined frequently. The interweaving of religion and tourism in particular raises controversial issues due to the intrinsic complexity and ambiguous definitions of both terms.

In April 2003, the European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS 2003) held the first expert meeting at Fatima in Portugal to discuss the motivation of visitors at religious sites and the administrative role of religious sites to serve the needs of holidaymakers and pilgrims and the interaction between modern pilgrims and devout pilgrims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Raj and Morpeth 2007: 8). Pilgrimage was initially mentioned as an integral activity in the tourism industry because a mixture of religious devotion, culture and pleasure potentially encourages a growing number of tourists (Urry and Larsen 2011:5). Pilgrimage is, thus, a mass product in the tourism industry (Eade and Sallow 1991; Feifer 1985:29). The modern pilgrimage practice has been systematically organised to predominantly serve the rapid growth of the tourism industry. Consequently, the diversity and development of religious tourism are broadly investigated by associating with multifaceted sociocultural and economic aspects. The studies of religious tourism manifest the emerging roles of the practice such as a new form of cultural product and a source of authority in the twenty-first century.

Religious tourism elucidates the close connection between religion and money. Although a rigid dichotomy between religion and tourism is distinctive, the two polemic terms occupy a liminal position representing from religious activities and ritual performances and both are subject to human beings (Fourie, Jaume, and Maria 2015: 51). The paradox of sacred and profane identities of this practice becomes a subject of interest especially from economic and cultural perspectives. Economically, religious tourism is

depicted as a source of economic development (Barro and McCleary 2003; Durlauf et al. 2012; Glahe and Vorhies 1989). Due to the fact that the identities within the context of religious tourism are dynamic and fluid, they can be developed and related to support the ongoing process of industrialisation and capitalism. Moreover, the relevant factors of religious tourism including people, places, and movement are the important issues for investment and financial decisions (Hergueux 2011; Maurer 2002; Peifer 2011). The relationship between religious tourism and economy is viewed from the creativity of the practices and forms of services. Such the notions become competing and challenging in the tourism industry. Pilgrimage which is recognised as a traditional form of religious tourism also gains the attractions from traders and tourist agents. Pilgrimage sites in which are predominantly religious shrines, temples, and churches have been reinforced to provide services and facilities for tourists and travellers. As a result of this, the conversion of the religious sites into tourist attractions has huge impacts on the identity of modern religions and even religious persons.

Consequently, tourism has a potential value to generate a large amount of income to many local and national communities. Likewise, religious tourism is recognised as a commodity in the capitalist context. Reader (2014), for instance, argued that the dynamics of marketplaces with the themes of pilgrimage being promoted, reshaped, invented and exhibited to increase the custom, along with issues of consumerism and the acquisition of material goods and souvenirs are necessary to survive the pilgrimage both sites and practices. Badone and Roseman (2004:16) agree that modern pilgrimages in Japan employ various elements of recreation and secular values such as national pride and family solidarity in order to promote the practice. Consequently, tourist destinations including pilgrimage sites suggest the growing 'economy of signs' of an industrial economy (Urry and Larsen 2011:48).

Culturally, religious tourism has been concerned about moral consideration and the appropriateness of the practice's adaptation. Likewise, the inherent complexity and ambiguous definitions of dual terms such as religious practice vs. religious tourism, pilgrim vs. tourist and sacred vs. profane sites are still consistently debated. Superstitions and magical rituals are distinctive combinations of religious tourism (Jackson 2016: 830). They are often marked as a promotion in the commodifying process of the religious tourism. Accordingly, the religious tourism has been criticised as the distortion of the dominant religion by the conservative people (Jackson 2003).

Apart from the economic and cultural potency, pilgrimage and religious tourism are employed to serve political purposes. The paradox of religious tourism provides a new

instrument of modern states via management by local and national authorities. The growth of mass tourism represents a kind of ‘democratisation’ of travel (Urry and Larsen 2011:31). It becomes a choice of social activities and increasingly competitive for holidaymakers, tourist agents and public authorities. Many states and authorities play an increasing role in systemising and determining the variety of tourism practices in response to current social circumstances as Berger (1972) convincingly argues individual societies are reinforced, reshaped, and constructed via both ‘place and practice’ to impose ‘ways of seeing’. In Thailand, religious tourism is a state-sponsored practice which aims to encourage the citizens to examine the values of religion with enjoyment (The Cultural Affairs department of Thailand 2015: 4). The sponsorship of religious tourism helps to generate ‘good’ public image of the state in which they can harness the practice to bolster national agendas, including the establishment of the monarchy (Jackson 2016: 829). Advertisement and mass media also play an essential role to embrace the potential power of the visual gaze to the social perception. The orientation of tourism package, for example, creates ideological images and experiences to the tourists, the ‘Fordist’ characteristics of mass tourism (Poon 1993: 32). They involve a standardised packaging of tourist products, which are consumed without social, environmental, and cultural concerns.

Although the fundamental concerns about the development of religious tourism in contemporary society emphasise moral and ethical consideration, the dynamism of religious tourism manifests a sign of huge interest from contemporary people in terms of economic and political benefits. Urry and Larsen (2011:97) argue the mobility of tourism goes far beyond the mere physical movement. Rather, the imaginative travel, virtual travel and communicative travel are also included (Sheller 2011; Urry 2007). Tourism industry continuously generates new roles and identities, such as those of producers and consumers, hosts and tourists (Leheny 1995: 367). Simultaneously, religious tourism illustrates a key strategy of the authorities as a source of power. Since the practice is attributed to the attachment of ethical values, the state facilitates its acceptance into shaping ‘new’ norms and values of citizens without recognition (Collins-Kreiner 2010: 450). I agree that the encounter and the mobility of the religious tourism become convincing for researchers because they lead to the understanding of the intrinsic complexity of the practice and social relevance. Consequently, religious tourism studies examine the various characters of the practice that lead to the comprehension of sociocultural changes within the modern social context.

In Thailand, the history of tourism was evident in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Meyer 1988: 61-63). Originally, tourism was a Thai urban-based middle class practice since travelling was specified for aristocrats as a leisure activity (Evrard and Prasit 2009a: 309). In Thai poetry, it appears a genre of writing called *Nirat* (นิราศ). It is used to describe the travellers' emotion and remote landscape along the nostalgic journey. Since the mid nineteenth century, tourism in Thailand has been investigated from the socio-political engagement. Thongchai (1994: 13) argued the travels of elites and aristocrats were the prerequisite for the construction of a 'Siamese geo-body'. The outlying sites visited by members of the elites became increasingly fixed mapped and claimed and set up a new kind of territorial power. Thai domestic tourism was developed as a royal and elite project connected to the development and construction of the Thai nation-state (Evrard and Prasit 2009b: 243). The consequence of the nationalism project leads to the idea of 'imagined' community (Anderson 1991). The imagined community by Anderson (1991) suggests geographical and spatial entity, with territorial boundaries within which national landmarks, shrines and sacred places are located provides symbolically central expression and embodying nationhood. Domestic tourism is also exploited to promote identity and thereby establishes Thailand as a strong nation and stable nation state.

Religious and cultural tourism is the most prominent form of tourism in Thailand. Due to the fact that Thailand, a Buddhist society, is replete with temples, spiritual shrines and sacred sites, they are attractive for domestic and international tourists. The value attachment including historical and cultural significance as well as the beautiful landscape of the religious sites has been promoted as the national heritage. For example, Peleggi (1996) studied the relevance of Thai heritage attractions to both international and domestic tourism. Most of heritage sites in Thailand are located in suburban areas. I therefore agree that Thai state strives to propose the process called 'extended metropolitanisation' (Forbes 1997; Ginsburg, Koppell and McGee 1991; McGee 1991, 2008; McGee and Robinson 1995; Parnwell and Wongsuphasawat 1997; Sowatree 1992). The process brings urbanism to a region that stretches more than 100 kilometres towards the east, west, north of central Bangkok (Reynolds 1998: 116-117). Tourists can enjoy travelling and experiencing traditional Thai knowledge in a short period. Thai state attempts to exercise the power over national heritage management because it provides a potential challenge to state-sanctioned definition of national history and identity (Peleggi 1996: 432). Consequently, Thai domestic tourist destinations play heavily on themes of nationalism and nostalgia. They contribute the sense of 'Thai-ness' during a time of social and cultural change (King and Hitchcock 2014: 30-31). The national elements of the

domestic tourism contribute to the structure of local mass tourism (Winter, Teo and Chang 2009: 11 – 14).

Nidhi (1994: 79) argues that the state-sponsored Buddhism explicitly supports the full range of elements of the symbolic complex of Thai prosperity cults. He noted that the elements of prosperity cults into Buddhist expressions emerged during the economic boom in the 1980s and 1990s. When superstitions and rituals became integral components of mainstream Thai religiosity, they assumed national significance and came to enjoy official support and sanction (Jackson 2016: 870). As a result, since the onset of the country's economic boom in the early 1980s, religious tourism includes rituals and spirit cults as integral components. Religious tourism has been considered as a commodity or a product in the capitalism context and extensively promoted as mass tourism. Reader and Tanabe (1998) argued that popular Buddhism and religiosity are problematic to separate the worldly from the religious concerns and the commercial dimensions of life from the so-called religious and spiritual because they are crucially bound together. In capitalism, the phenomenon of tourism in Thailand is dynamic, not only domestically but also at international levels. The objective of tourism in Thailand transcends leisure. It provides of ideological and authoritative implication. Consequently, tourism industry in Thailand conveys the complexity of communicative networks, the multiplication of 'local histories', the idealisation of the rural, the politics of heritage, and the availability of various publications. All of these notions affect the development of leisure mobility, and the capacity for domestic tourism, among Thai citizens (Evrard and Prasit 2009a: 312; 2009b: 244-245).

Economically, although Buddhism is valorised as being the centre of the Thai heart and the very root of Thai-ness, modernity and capitalism are now distorting the religion's traditional principal role while creating 'new' roles for contemporary Buddhism. Ritual practices have been (re)invented to play new roles while fulfilling eternal human needs; religious tourism, for example, could be understood as an example of invented tradition. Poramin (2013:133-168) studies '*Nong Khao*<sup>12</sup> cultural village' as seen through the organisation of tourist activities during the *Thet Mahachat* festival. He argues that the festival is a sphere within which residents (as the insiders) and tourists (as the outsiders) can collaborate; while insiders create and organise the events, outsiders are welcomed and participate in the activities. Nevertheless, the forms of the activities still represent the traditional lives of the *Nong Kao* villagers.

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<sup>12</sup> *Nong Khao* is the name of the village in *Kanchanaburi* province.

In order to develop new networks, ‘invented traditions’ attempt to establish consistency with a selected collective past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 3). Sakon (2010) studied temple tourism in central Thailand, in particular the historical background to tourism and its strategic development and promotion by the Bangkok Mass Transit authority (BMTA) in the nine temples project, the same phenomenon I have selected for my project. The study found that the nine temples project represented not only a new form of domestic tourism but was also a response to the economic policy of Prime Minister *Thaksin Shinawatra*’s government. It also illustrated the organisational potential of the BMTA regarding economically advantageous activities. I therefore believe that the ‘invention’ of religious activities in Thai society has become a new form of commodification within the contemporary Thai economic system.

In conclusion, although there are a large number of the studies on pilgrimage and religious tourism in Thailand, it is still limited on the development of the religious practices intertwined with the radical economic, social, and political changes especially in the non-liberal period. The study of *wai phra kao wat* will focus on these mentioned issues in order to assess the emergence of the Buddhist phenomenon regarding the existence and application in the contemporary Thai society. I will also investigate the construction of this practice by articulating to the notions of ritual, pilgrimage, and tourism. The dynamic applications and various forms of creativity provided in the practice reflect the values and identities of both contemporary Thai society and people.

## Theoretical framework

To do justice to the complexity of this topic, namely *wai phra kao wat*, I employ a theoretical framework that encompasses performance theory, rhetoric, and power to analyse the empirical data and to arrive at a full and convincing explanation for the various phenomena being studied.

### *Performance Theory*

The theory of performance can be employed to address forms of ritual practice. However, these ritual activities are so rich with characters, including practitioners, devotees and spectators, that they have become acts which not only shows the distinctive relationship between people and their practices (Geertz 2000) but also transform into

interactive processes whereby performers seek to catch the eyes of their audience via their 'imagined' actions (Rao 2006: 145). When Thai people visit or even simply pass by temples or sacred shrines, for instance, most of them quickly respond with a '*wai*' (the gesture of placing the palms together while bowing the head) out of respect to the sacred object. According to Grimes (2006: 391), 'performativity embodies and yet hides within itself the weight of history and the authority of society'. The action of '*wai*' thus implies not only a specific meaning but also privileges the 'hidden' values of Buddhism and other spiritual beliefs embedded in Thai society.

Ritual performance synchronises individuals' human thoughts with organised cultural ideas within a social context and then creates a variety of 'meaningful' symbols (Tambiah 1981; Rao 2006: 147-148). Merit-making exemplifies this interpretation of the symbolic actions of rituals. Taylor's study (1993: 290-291) of pilgrims' practices when visiting the forest monks of northeastern Thailand found that those participants he classed as 'urban pilgrims' preferred to make offerings to forest monks, because they assumed that Bangkok monasteries received too much material support from devotees. Other pilgrims in the same study sought to maximise their enjoyment of the pilgrimage while simultaneously 'paying respect' to a famous forest monk. It can be concluded that in all cases the performance of ritualised merit-making can guarantee the devotees' access to the sacred (*saksit*) merit power inherent in the persons or objects venerated. This sacred power is believed to effect favourable benefits for the devotees (Taylor 1993:291).

Ritual performance is comprised of many counteractive and interactive processes involving various parties (Schieffelin 1996:194). Performers are often criticised about their individual identities and intrinsic dispositions. Performing certain actions becomes a means of securing acceptance as part of society. However, it can sometimes lead to resistance, as Grimes (2006: 394) noted 'images, especially performed ones, are more effective than theories at actually challenging dominant, popular ideas of ritual'. Jackson's (1999) case study of *Luang Phor* (Reverend Father) *Khoon* illustrates an idealised image of a Thai cult figure. Although Khoon's charismatic position and his collection of auspicious objects made him prominent and suggested that he dealt with a huge amount of money, he was never accused of corruption, and his life remained simple and ascetic. Moreover, he acted as an icon for poor people to whom he helped distributing funds. *Luang Phor Khoon*'s image thus epitomises the Buddhist monastic life in Thailand. However, there has been debate around whether his position at the centre of a modern capitalist 'prosperity religion' is destroying core Buddhist values or adapting them to a new cultural context (Jackson 1999:5). In case of *wai phra kao wat*, the performances of



participants and even organisers embody their demands and preference about Buddhism from the social viewpoint. Consequently, the theory of performance can be used to tease out the exact meanings of actions, relationships between participants and organisers at the religious spaces within the societal environment and also with the constituted 'self' in the actions of ritual performance.

### *Rhetorical perspectives*

Rhetoric in the communicating process is an important mechanism with which to enforce 'convincing' power (Durkheim 1915: 427; Galaty 1983: 361). The rhetorical power of ritual studies exemplifies an interesting complex of persuasive action. For example, considering Buddhist practice as a therapeutic method, the rhetorical power of language enables it to persuade with conviction and to serve as a therapeutic corrective. Carrithers (2009: ix) has concentrated on the rhetorical edge of social culture at all scales of human events. He has suggested that the function of rhetoric is to make the study of human beings much easier when observing human understandings of experience. Merli (2005) focused on a specific level of rhetoric in studying how religious interpretations of tsunami in *Satun*, a southern Thai province, have served to recast the ethno-religious boundaries of local communities. As with the rhetorical perspective of Buddhist belief, while understandings of such catastrophes differed they were interpreted by some Buddhists as punishment for human misconduct (Merli 2005: 58). It can be concluded that the successful embodiment of the effective practical ideas accompanying proper communication is necessary in the social context.

A ritual with 'successful communication' can produce a special relationship between spectators and practitioners (Gladigow 2006: 485), embedding the continuity and multiplicity of this practice. To be 'good' Buddhists, for instance, the 'good' Buddhists have tended to organise themselves around temples in order to participate in ritual practice and associated activities and demonstrate their religiousness. As a result ritual practices in contemporary Thai society remain pervasive, and are also continually being (re)invented to complement the Thai perception of being 'good'. However, according to Severi (2006: 584), rituals are 'masked speech'; it is necessary to consider the organisation of a ritual action to uncover its meaning. The 'hidden' symbols in ritual actions are necessary to be interpreted as they often mislead and cause controversies.

The encouragement of ritual activities by the Thai government enables rituals to be interpreted in terms of power. The Thai government has recently organised and

promoted a variety of special Buddhist events in order to encourage Thai devotees to express their beliefs in Buddhism based on a provided agenda. Prime Minister *Prayuth Chan-ocha* has simultaneously promoted ‘12 national core values of the Thai people’, one of which is ‘upholding the nation, religion and monarchy’<sup>13</sup>. These values can be interpreted as concealing a ‘hidden’ agenda, as it is clear that the government’s intention in promoting them goes beyond merely sponsoring Buddhist institutions or cementing Thai perceptions of being ‘good’. Religious institutions have become an instrument wielded by the government to protect their authority and power by promoting the issue of national solidarity. According to this interpretation of their actions, the more Thais respect and concede power to the three central institutions of the king, nation and religion, the easier governance will be. The power of rhetoric within the religious sphere is thus also an important strategy employed by the government to sustain Thai national authority.

The complexity of symbolic and verbal actions embedded in rituals means that rhetoric can provide an important framework for conveying cultural practice and thus depicting the relationship between culture and society (Carrithers 2009: ix). Moreover, the effect of inciting or resolving ritual actions in rhetorical perspective can standardise ethical considerations in each individual society.

### *Ritual and power*

Although freedom of religion in Thailand is guaranteed, Buddhism’s elevated status affirms it as one of the fundamental elements of modern Thai nationalism and identity (Thongchai 2015: 91). Thai authorities historically had the responsibility for protecting and fostering Buddhism, while since the mid-nineteenth century the king has had to be Buddhist (Thongchai 2015: 97). It would thus follow that diverse power is subject to Buddhist practices and can lead to controversies in Thai society.

The organisation of the *sangha* (the Buddhist monastic order, especially in its institutional form) implies the significance of hierarchical status. The *Sangha*’s missions contribute to regulations and rules that are inclined to dominate ways of Thai life in majority. The administrative arrangement of the *Sangha* is made via the king’s patronage; a formal hierarchy explicit in internal authoritative practices such as an honouring system which ranks monks, funds, and temple properties. The king is present for all final *sangha*

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Students-to-recite-12-core-values-of-the-nation-da-30243522.html>

decisions (Tambiah 1970: 79) and the *sangha* is related directly to the government through the Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Culture, which disburses funds and approves legislative rules. Due to the absolute power of the king in the royal monasteries, the descending order such as anti-royal groups and some politicians was conspired to seize power.

The *kathin* ceremony, for example, is a sphere for power negotiations between the king, the state and the people. As Gladigow (2006:488) argued, the connections between human rituals, movements, and emotions is so rich that it tempts politicians and authorities to manipulate these activities then contribute their negotiating power. Traditionally, a *kathin* ceremony is an event in which the king and his family offer merit-making gifts to the monks following the lenten retreat (*khao phansaa*) (Gray 1991:47). This ceremony is a key royal calendrical practice. After the Siamese introduced a constitutional monarchy in 1932, royal privilege was steadily eroded by politicians (Gray 1991:50). Field Marshal *Plaek Phibunsongkram* (1897 – 1964), prime minister during 1938 – 1944 and 1948 – 1957, then imitated the form of the *kathin* ceremony and designated it a state ceremony (*rathapithi*). The competition for virtue between the monarchy and the state explicitly provides a visible example of the exercise of political power in Thailand. In contrast to this negotiation of state power, the people, especially the newly-rich, have re-established the practice of *kathin* to maintain social equilibrium by providing well-organised merit-making tours at the same time as the main *kathin* ceremony. These trips involve pilgrimage tourism to distant provinces in search of forest monks and facilitating them (Taylor 1993:291-292).

Consequently, as the examples above demonstrate, the ritual activities embedded in Thai society are by no means symmetrical in the majority of Thai perception; instead the overwhelming power associated with the hierarchical structure of the monarchy and state authorities intensively coexists in Thai society. The proposed study of *wai phra kao wat* will employ all the theories discussed above as a framework with which to investigate the complexities of this cultural phenomenon and its relations with various social dimensions, both historical and contemporary.

## Key definitions

I want to point out the specific key terms that are applied in order to clarify their exact meanings and their usage within this text.

## Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage traditionally represented a sacred journey that embodied intensified versions of valued ideals (Morinis 1992:4). The pilgrims' destinations were the pilgrimage centres that most corresponded to their individual 'spiritual magnetism' (Pruess 1992:211). Turner (1969:131) argued that pilgrimage is an anti-structural phenomenon that destroys *communitas*' experience within organised social systems. Although pilgrimage journeys are constrained within universal territory, they still go beyond the religious structure within which they were generated and persisted (Morinis 1992:8). Pilgrimage centres are also portrayed as 'repositories for cultural ideas' (Morinis 1992:5), and usually overlap and are infused with tourism and entertainment spheres. As Turner and Turner (1978:20) suggested, 'a tourist is half a pilgrimage, if a pilgrim is half a tourist'. Religion has been co-opted by the leisure sphere and has steadily become more subjective and optional in post-industrial societies.

Traditional Theravada pilgrimages involved journeying to four sacred places in India and Nepal, all related to key events in the Buddha's life (Pruess 1992:213). However, Theravada Buddhist pilgrimages within Thailand centred on such symbolic sites as temples and shrines associated with supernatural appearances of the Buddha, as the Buddha's supposed footprints or relics could be found there. Monks were responsible for the composition of shrine histories and the incorporation of ritual services (Pruess 1992:213). The first organised Theravada pilgrimage tour in Thailand was for professional elite supporters of the government to northeastern temples during *Sarit*'s national development program of the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> A turning point in the process of pilgrimage becoming a form of tourism was the search for traditional means of moral legitimation by establishment authorities and political forces (Taylor 1993:315).

Promotions and public representation within the economic global context has enabled pilgrimage in contemporary Thai society to flourish (Reader 2014:192). Its organisation is subject to the influence of mass transportation and communications, and is increasingly mediated by full-time travel agencies (Turner and Turner 1978:38). Pilgrimages are becoming increasingly transformed into thoroughly modern events, such as forms of cultural and heritage tours. The pilgrims/tourists are barely differentiated;

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<sup>14</sup> Field Marshal *Sarit Thanarat* was Thailand's Prime Minister during 1957-1963 after staging a military coup in the 1957 Revolution.

they are able to evade any concerns about faith while entering into a world of cultural riches (Reader 2014:192-193). The current study of ‘*wai phra kao wat*’ as a new form of pilgrimage will fully analyse the significance of a whole range of relevant socio-cultural phenomena, including culture, politics and economics, as a means of more fully understanding Buddhism’s place in contemporary Thai society and culture.

### *Thainess*

Thainess is a topical theme in which ideology makers attempt to address the exact definition. The ideology of Thainess emerges from the Thai term *kwam pen thai* (ความเป็นไทย). Since the 1950s, the king and court have constructed a view of ‘Thainess’ that could claim ‘hegemonic stature’ (Anderson 1978) and be beneficial for ‘enlisting compliance’ (Durrenger 1996: 8). Subsequently, folk culture has been added as a view of Thainess (Durrenberger 1996: 8).

Godelier (1986: 157) argues that there is:

only one way of explaining how dominated individuals and groups can “spontaneously” consent to their own domination: the latter must appear as a *service* rendered them by the dominant, whose power henceforth seems so legitimate that the dominated feel it to be their duty to serve those who are serving them. The dominant and the dominated must therefore *share* the same representations if the strongest component in the power of the former over the latter is to emerge i.e. consent resting upon the recognition of the benefits, the legitimacy and the necessity of this power.

In the past, Thainess meant nationalism. Stengs (2009:19) argues that Thainess is a ‘shared, official, nationalist ideology’. This concept was introduced by King Vajiravudh, or Rama VI (1910 - 1925), in 1911. According to King Rama VI, the word ‘Thai’ has a double meaning that means ‘independence’ and ‘the martial race of the “Thai” inhabiting Siam’ (Barmé 1993: 27 – 30). Associated with his analysis, independence is a natural and essential element of Thainess. This unique character identified by King Rama VI brought the impetus to an official Thai nationalism, ‘a willed merger of nation and dynastic empire’ (Anderson 1991: 86) that was – and still is – essentially ethnic in nature (Stengs 2009: 19). When globalisation plays a role in Thai society, the concept of Thainess becomes an attempt to present Thai independence and

identity in the global development (Stengs 2009: 18). Thai state also attributes the term of Thainess to create the uniqueness and sustain the establishment of the Thai nation. The definition of Thainess nowadays evolves from the aspects of central authorities, local and ethnic groups. The culture is also counterpart of being Thainess as Anderson (1991: 12) noted,

What I am proposing is that nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being.

According to the view of the recent government, General Prayut Chan-ocha claims to be promoting ‘Thainess without ignoring global practices and international norms’. He describes that Thainess is neither ‘nationalism’ nor ‘patriotism’. Thainess is the extent of the Pracharat (people-state) policy which emphasises internal growth and public participation and support. Meanwhile, the private sector and the academic sector cooperate to support the growth and power of the nation. Thainess in the last bid focuses on the cooperative innovation from the fundamental sectors of the Thai modern structure; government, public and private and merge the gap from hierarchical status on the single standard of Thai-ness.

In this study, *Thainess* is based on the unique character of Thais and makes explicit on dispositions, lifestyles, and idea. This term still implies two levels of meanings; that of the nationalist interpretation and the identity that characterise Thais to be different from others.

## Chapter 2

### The multiple paths to *Wai Phra Kao Wat* in Bangkok

#### Introduction

Since *wai phra kao wat* was promoted as religious tourism, its rapid success has led to the expansion of routes and destinations both inside and outside of Bangkok. The model of the practice is widely connected with various purposes, activities, and service providers. Each promotion of the practice has extended to deal with more complex issues, from matters of the individual worshippers to those of the nation-state. The trajectory of *wai phra kao wat* consequently reflects not only the prominence of the practice but also specific sociocultural and political circumstances in contemporary Thai society.

This chapter explores the multiplicity of *wai phra kao wat* from its origin to the present using information from various materials and my own fieldwork findings. I principally focused on the practices held in Bangkok. This chapter is divided into five sections. First, I will introduce meanings of *wai phra kao wat* to investigate the fundamental concept and discipline of the practice. Second, I will detail the diversity of *wai phra kao wat* to show the origin and the development of the practice in Thailand. The evidence in this section is from academic studies, relevant publications such as articles, journals, and newspapers, and media records. Third, I will use my ethnographic material to provide a description of the routes' expansion in 2015 – 2016, which will demonstrate the significance of Buddhism for the contemporary Thai state. Fourth, I will demonstrate the complexity of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thailand from the case study of *wai phra kao wat*. Finally, I will analyse how *wai phra kao wat* gives rise to socioeconomic and political controversies in contemporary Thai society.

#### Studies of *Wai Phra Kao Wat*

*Wai phra kao wat* is a term formed by three elements; '*wai phra*' (paying homage to the Buddha; ไหว้พระ), '*kao*' (number nine; เก้า), and '*wat*' (temple; วัด). The individual elements combined signify the entangled relations between Buddhist performance and auspicious belief that represents today's 'Buddhist' practices in Thai society. Simultaneously, the *wai phra kao wat* practice demonstrates that the majority of Thais

still cling to the transcendental power of Buddhism and exploit it to bolster their living this-worldly aspirations. The symbolic meanings from the title have been cunningly mobilised by various public and private organisations for diverse purposes such as a marketing strategy, corporate image building for businesses, and political affiliations. The prominence of the practice is made explicit by the variety of route destinations, means of transportation, the number of institutions involved, and even features of popular culture such as film and online games. Although the exact origin of *wai phra kao wat* is difficult to ascertain, the official promotion of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok originated in 1994.

Since then, *wai phra kao wat* has been adapted and expanded to bolster individual purposes and specific social situations that I will illustrate in the next section. I argue that the dynamic changes of *wai phra kao wat* such as the objectives of the practice and the emerging relations with sociocultural and political perspectives effectively reveals Thai people's mindset, sociocultural and political responses, and religious significance under the umbrella term of what is called 'modernity'<sup>15</sup> in contemporary Thai society.

Surprisingly, no western scholar has published on *wai phra kao wat* whereas Thai scholars have been very active. Previous studies of *wai phra kao wat* examined the practice from various disciplinary perspectives such as tourism (Chareonsri 2009; Jirayuth et.al. 2007; Phusadee et.al 2009; Sudathip 2011), cultural studies (Jarima 2014), business administration (Sakon 2010), and anthropology (Ekarin 2007; Kritkamon 2004). All of this literature dates after the year 2000. It shows what a great impression *wai phra kao wat* has made in Thailand. The majority of the studies are policy-oriented (Chad 2008; Chareonsri 2009; Jirayuth et.al. 2007; Phusadee et.al 2009; Sakon 2010; Somboon 2012; Thanop 2011). These scholars investigate the emergence of multiple routes and the proliferation of related activities and conclude that the popularity of *wai phra kao wat* illustrates from the diversity and expansion of this practice into suburban and rural areas. Phusadee et.al (2009) found that most participants are women aged of 20 – 35 years old, contradicting previous assumptions that had considered the elderly as the primary participants in the practice. A study by Sudathip (2011) focused on the elderly participants, who being often dependent on other's help, could not take part in the pilgrimage unaccompanied. In other words, *wai phra kao wat* took shape as a family trip since their decision to participate was bound on the approval and cooperation of other family members and relatives.

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<sup>15</sup> 'Modernity' refers to the Thai term, '*samai mai*' (สมัยใหม่) which relates to the present and up-to-date characters of attitudes and activities marked by a significant departure from traditional styles and values (source: Royal Society of Thailand. <http://www.royin.go.th/dictionary/>).



Some initial studies attempted to clarify the origin of *wai phra kao wat* and analyse its prominence and impacts on the sociocultural perspectives. Jarima (2014) analysed *wai phra kao wat* as a cultural tourism phenomenon to explain its impacts on related cultural resources both tangible and intangible. For example, the tangible values of architecture became attractive to tourist whereas the names of the temples as the intangible culture provide sacred and magical meanings that are exploited in the promotional campaigns. To clarify, when temples and sacred sites on the route of TAT 2002 were promoted using their ‘auspicious’ names relating to Thai folkloric belief, the *wai phra kao wat* practice rapidly attracted large numbers of pilgrims-tourists. The numbers became problematic causing security issues and overcrowding people (Jarima 2014: 67). In contrast, the prominence of this practice standardised the model of *wai phra kao wat* for private agencies and individuals such as ‘*tam boon kao wat sa dor khror* by *Khun Pong*’ (Making merits at the nine temples for warding off bad luck with Mr. Pong, a tourist agent; ทำบุญเก้าวัดสะเดาะเคราะห์). In addition, she recommended that in order to decrease negative impacts of the practice such as touristic overcrowding and unequal income distribution between the nine temples and other temples, the collaboration between Bangkok Tourism Division and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) should be more concerned in the set of policies about the cultural management. According to the aforementioned issues, I found that the studies of *wai phra kao wat* are limited on the influences of the practice towards people and monasteries. The exercise of public authority via the adaptation and sponsorship of the *wai phra kao wat* practice has not been studied. In my study, I will contribute my study on these issues to shed light on the significance of *wai phra kao wat* in the contemporary Thai social context, with reference to cultural, political, and economic perspectives.

Another interesting source of information about *wai phra kao wat* is based on guidebooks and online blogs. Stylistically, they are written as travelogues by identifying the nine temples’ route as the background and enriching it with the writers’ experiences and anecdotes along the journeys. Such works have contributed to making *wai phra kao wat* become a trendy activity in contemporary Thailand (Chareonsri 2009; Jirayuth et al. 2007; Phusadee et al. 2007). For example, Chad (2008) published a guidebook entitled, ‘*Tour wai phra 9 wat*’ (a short trip to pay homage to the Buddha at the nine temples; ทัวร์ไหว้พระเก้าวัด) by focusing on the ritual belief of ‘*ahosigam*’ (the forgiveness of sins; อโหสิกรรม). His guidebook attracts the readers with his narrative experiences and draws them into the practice. In addition, public authorities such as the TAT, the Department of

Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture, the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) and Bangkok Tourism Division also published brochures and printed documents to promote *wai phra kao wat* routes for which they are sponsors in special occasions. In this case, the information is provided in a more formal style consisting of the list of nine temples and sacred sites, the regulations of the practices, a brief history of each temple, and collective stamp boxes.

Approaching *wai phra kao wat* from an anthropological perspective, Kritkamon (2004) defined it as a social phenomenon of a weak community. He argued that when Buddhism in Thailand reinterpreted 'new' meanings to serve consumerism, it misled Thais to focus on worldly achievement which is in stark opposition to the canon of Buddhist teachings. Due to this misconception of Buddhism, popular forms of devotion are exploited via a commodifying process typical of the business world and therefore become a morally problematic issue. I agree with his study but the applications of *wai phra kao wat* related to hidden power and state sponsorship still need to be further investigated.

Even though *wai phra kao wat* is controversial, it continues to attract state sponsorship. Ekarin (2007) argued that the popularity of *wai phra kao wat* originates in the formulation of meaning as a modern ritual and contemporary folk belief. He illustrated this reflection starting from the interpretation of number nine and its positive meaning based on Thai folk belief. Also, the selection of temples or sacred places as destinations on specific routes is based on their historical or legendary presence of significant religious figures and sacred implication, often signposted by the temple name. Ekarin (2007) also explained that the 1997 financial crisis in Thailand catalysed the increasing popularity of *wai phra kao wat* in the contemporary context because the practice was perceived as a source of alternate power to relieve social tensions paralleling to the boom of spirit cults in Thailand. Although I accept these researchers' findings, I will go beyond them to argue that *wai phra kao wat* is also a new instrument of the modern Thai state. It acts as an undisputed means for the government to integrate people and create social equilibrium at the core institutions. I will further investigate this issue in chapter 5 and 6.

After reviewing the sources mentioned above, I can state that apart from the recognition of *wai phra kao wat* as a sociocultural phenomenon in contemporary Thai society, the practice recently has been undergoing further transformation. On the one hand, the complexity of the practice has been exploited by various agents. The tourist trades and the tourism authority of Thailand, for example, portray *wai phra kao wat* as a cultural product in the new market and as preserving traditional values. On the other hand,

both positive and negative impacts of the practice suggest rhetorical power at work to create image and identity not only of the individual but also of state authorities. The dynamic of *wai phra kao wat* has paralleled the sociocultural changes in the modern society. Similarly, with little public concern, the sponsorship of *wai phra kao wat* suggests that the military rule attempts to overcome political conflict in this era of political polarisation. The state exerts power over religious affairs in order to enhance Thais' confidence in the military while proclaiming the legitimacy of the contemporary state. However, there are few analyses on these issues. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* will be focused on the relationship between this 'invented' Buddhist practice and sociopolitical engagement in contemporary Thai society. Moreover, the practice in terms of a modern pilgrimage will be explored as a resort of negotiating power between Thai citizens and central authorities to create unity and formulate ethical identity of modern Thais.

### Origins and development of *Wai Phra Kao Wat*

In this section, I will provide a detailed description of the historical background of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok principally based on sources such as publications, interviews, and social media. I will arrange these materials in chronological order to best highlight the developing process of the practice. Also, I will prioritise features of organisers, themes and purposes, forms of activities, time duration, and trip cost that implicate the impacts of *wai phra kao wat* during my field research in 2015 – 2016. At the end of this section, I will provide the summary description about the origin and development of *wai phra kao wat* in a table.

The travelling pattern, 'one day trip to worship in many temples', was officially promoted in Bangkok in 1994. Only six destinations were promoted on the route called, '*Sakkara hok mongkhol sathan nai krungthep*'<sup>16</sup> ('Worshipping the six sacred sites in Bangkok'; สักการะหกมงคลสถานในกรุงเทพฯ). The practice was organised by a famous Thai astrologer, Mr. Suriyan Sujaritpolwong<sup>17</sup> also known as *Mor Yong* (Ekarin 2007: 62; Jarima 2014: 65). The six sacred sites were chosen for their auspicious names which related to mundane satisfactions such as wealth, business achievement, and happiness.

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<sup>16</sup> The six sacred places consist of *Suthat thepwararam* temple, *Chetuphon wimonmangkalararam worramahavihara* temple, *Phrasrirattana satsadaram* temple, City pillar shrine of Bangkok (*san lak muang*), *Chanasonkram* temple, and *Indra vihara* temple.

<sup>17</sup> He passed away in November, 2015.

However, when this campaign was publicly launched, it was not widely accepted as many people said the suggested number (six) was associated with negative meanings in Thai belief. Literally, the pronunciation of number six in the Thai language (หก; *hok*) signifies other negative connotations in Thai language such as falling down (*hok lom*; หกล้ม), fall head over heels (*hok kamen*; หกคะเมน), and spilling (hok; หก) (Ekarin 2007: 63). As a result, the number nine was instead adopted into the practice because in Thai language, since ‘nine’ (*kao*; เก้า) and ‘progression’ (*kaona*;ก้าวหน้า) are homophones and carry a positive connotation. Subsequently, the Bangkok Tourism Division added three more temples on its route including *Rakhang kositaram*, *Arun ratchawararam*, and *Baworn niwetvihara* on its original six-temple route. The mere adoption of the number nine into the promoting campaign created a sudden popularity. When I interviewed a street food vendor at a temple, she evoked her pleasant memory of *wai phra kao wat* by saying,

I have known *wai phra kao wat* for nearly twenty years when *Mor Yong* promoted the practice on the occasion of the New Year festival. This temple is included as the destination. After that day, nearly a thousand Thais from around the country came here [the temple] everyday for a few months later. The temple was overcrowded with either people or cars. Especially on both Thai and Chinese New Year festival. People had to queue before entering in the main hall. However, I was really happy because my foods and drinks sold like hot cakes.

When the Asian financial crisis hit in 1997, a high number of businesses and private companies went bankrupt with a series of serious social consequences including rising suicide rates and people with depression rates. The dynamics of these economic and cultural changes resulted in a new growth of spirit cults and magic power in urban Thai society, probably as a solution to daily life crises (Ekarin 2007: 62; Stengs 2009: 19). Likewise, *wai phra kao wat* was reinterpreted and considered as a social outlet for the difficulties people experienced. It was at this time that the Tourism Division, the Culture, Sports, and Tourism department, The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and TAT promoted *wai phra kao wat* as a form of domestic tourism. According to the government policy referring to the economic situation, tourism could stimulate domestic spending during the economic crisis. Consequently, the organisers designated the destinations of *wai phra kao wat* around the Rattanakosin Island which is considered the historical centre of Bangkok. The prominence of the practice became a model for the

expansion of the *wai phra kao wat* practice in local communities and rural areas in Thailand (Jarima 2014: 58 – 59).

In 2000, the Tourism Division, the Culture, Sports and Tourism department, and BMA promoted ‘*Walking tour kao wat*’ (Walking tour to the nine temples; วอล์กถึงท้าวเก้าวัด). It was the seventh route of the BMA project entitled ‘*dern tao tong tiew yan prawatsat*’ (Walking tour around historical sites; เดินเท้าท่องเที่ยวย่านประวัติศาสตร์). The objective of the project was to encourage heritage tourism and promote the old areas of Bangkok. Due to becoming the most popular destination by the BMA project, the organiser selected the ‘*Walking tour kao wat*’ route to promote again on the occasion of the 2000 – 2001 New Year celebrations in Bangkok. By doing this, the BMA organisers spread information via a mailing list system to all regular attendees about the ‘*Walking tour kao wat*’ activity. The expense to take part in this activity was approximately 100 baht <sup>18</sup> per person including the cost of offerings including flowers, candles, incensed sticks, and gold leaves and snacks during the journey<sup>19</sup>.

In 2001, TAT organised a seminar, entitled ‘How to develop temples to become tourist attractions in the future’ (TAT 2002). The seminar was aimed to the clergy, to provide 200 monks from Bangkok with knowledge of the history and significance of the nine temples in *Ayutthaya*<sup>20</sup>, but it very quickly earned wider attention (TAT 2002). The following year, the TAT therefore promoted the seminar as a form of a religious tourism campaign for the general public in the following year (TAT 2002).

In 2002, TAT in cooperation with the Tourism Division, the Culture, Sports and Tourism department, and BMA selected nine sacred sites in Bangkok<sup>21</sup> where were mostly based on the destinations of the seventh BMA route in 2000. On this occasion, the practice was widely promoted at the national level. The specific theme was ‘*Wai Phra Kao Sathanthee Saksit*’ (Paying homage to the nine sacred places; ไหว้พระเก้าสถานที่ศักดิ์สิทธิ์). TAT promoted the activity via public media and also invited public figures, celebrities, media representatives, and representatives from tourist agents around the country to the

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<sup>18</sup> It is approximate £2.17.

<sup>19</sup> Interviewing a BMA officer on 4 November 2015.

<sup>20</sup> *Ayutthaya* is a province in central part of Thailand. It consists of a large number of temples and historical sites because it used to be the capital city of Siam (Thailand nowadays) in Ayutthaya period (1350 – 1767).

<sup>21</sup> ‘*Wai Phra Kao Sathanthee Saksit*’ (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine sacred places; ไหว้พระเก้าสถานที่ศักดิ์สิทธิ์) includes *Chanasongkram* temple, the city pillar shrine of Bangkok, *Phrasrirattanasatsadaram* temple, *Suthatthepwararam* temple, the Tiger shrine (*san chao phor suea*), *Rakhangkhosittaram* temple, *Arunratchawararam* temple, *Kallayanamitr* temple, and *Chetuphon wimolmangkararam* temple.

opening ceremony. Once the news was broadcasted, the practice rapidly attracted a large number of pilgrims-tourists. TAT arranged bus services for the participants with tickets costing 399 baht<sup>22</sup> for an adult and 299 baht<sup>23</sup> for a child under 12 years old. Additionally, the nine temples destinations were categorised into three groups: north of *Phra nakorn*, south of *Phra nakorn* and *Thonburi* for safety control and overcrowding protection (Jarima 2014: 67). The achievement of the TAT route established itself in Thais' perception as a model of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok until this very day<sup>24</sup>. Additionally, due to the rapid success of the practice, TAT launched two new routes in Bangkok under the titles 'Wai Phra Wat Kao Ratchakarn' (paying homage to the nine royal patronage temples in Chakri dynasty; ไหว้พระวัดเก้ารัชกาล) and 'Wai Phra Kao Wat Long Mae Nam Chao Phraya' (Cruising for paying homage to the Buddha at the nine riverine temples along the Chao Phraya river; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดล่องแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา). The introduction of the two routes aimed to disperse the crowds, avoid overcrowding conflicts and also to solve traffic congestion in the preceding routes (Jarima 2014: 70).

TAT and BMA are the originators of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok. To avoid the misconception of *wats* (temples), TAT and BMA decided to replace the two shrines (the Bangkok city pillar shrine and Tiger shrine) where had been promoted as the destinations of the *wai phra kao wat* practice to the two temples namely, *Baworn niwet vihara* temple and *Sa ked* temple in 2004 (Jarima 2014: 69). In addition, TAT also promoted the practice with auspicious meanings of the temples' names (I will elaborate the details in chapter 5). When this promotion was launched on the occasion of New Year celebration in 2004, the practice became massively successful. The nine-temple destinations by TAT and BMA 2004 as a result have been the most popular model of the *wai phra kao wat* practice in Bangkok until the present.

In 2006, BMTA promoted a route in Bangkok under the title of 'Krob Krua Sooksun Wai Phra Kao Wat with BMTA' (Happy families with a trip of 'paying homage to the nine temples' by BMTA). To do this, BMTA created several of the nine temples routes in both Bangkok and suburb areas and promoted as one-day trip. BMTA sold the tickets including the bus and service fees. The prices of the tickets were different based on individual routes. The BMTA project was held in accordance with the government policy of Thaksin Shinawatra (2003) and General Surayuth Julanont (2006). It aimed to encourage domestic tourism as well as to reaffirm the family as an important foundation

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<sup>22</sup> It is approximate £8.67.

<sup>23</sup> It is approximate £6.5.

<sup>24</sup> Interviewing Amnaj Suttachai, a TAT officer, on 20 January 2016.

of modern Thai society. Parallel to this, BMTA was struggling with a continuing financial loss calculated of approximately 500 million baht <sup>25</sup> a month during 2006 – 2009 (Sakon 2010: 165). As a result, BMTA launched the project of ‘*Krob Krua Sooksun wai phra kao wat with BMTA*’ (Happy families with a trip of ‘paying homage to the nine temples’ by BMTA) in order to respond the government policy and to seek out a solution to its financial losses. In order to serve this project, for example, BMTA allocated bus services for *wai phra kao wat* participants. The organiser created the distinctive character of the route by taking the participants to *Don wai* floating market in Nakorn Pathom<sup>26</sup> at the end of the trip. At the same time, BMTA also promoted another route naming ‘*Wai Phra Haa Wat Chom Sam Talad Nam*’ (Paying homage to the five temples in Bangkok and travelling to the three floating markets in *Nakorn Pathom*; ไหว้พระห้าวัด ชมสามตลาดน้ำ)<sup>27</sup>. The ticket cost 359 baht a person<sup>28</sup>. Although the previous route was not in total of nine destinations, the model of ‘going to many temples in a day’ was taken as a part of this activity. The BMTA routes have been held on Sundays and public holidays since 2006.

Additionally, BMTA has promoted the campaign of ‘*Rod May Free Wai Phra Kao Wat*’ (‘free bus services for paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples’; รถมฟรีไหว้พระเก้าวัด) since 2010. During 2010 – 2011, BMTA offered free buses to pick up passengers from the bus terminal (*Mo chit 2*) and from the Victory Monument (*Anusawaree Chai Samorraphoom*;อนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิ) to the temples destinations around Rattanakosin Island. In this campaign, participants could collect stamps from the nine destinations and exchange for a gift. BMTA provided staff to facilitate the participants and give the stamp at checking points in the nine temples’ areas. The campaign is recognised as one of the most successful activities of BMTA<sup>29</sup>. According to Thai News Agency (TNAMCOT, 2011), 150,000 participants took part in this campaign. However, nowadays, the BMTA free bus service is restricted only for the route around Rattanakosin

<sup>25</sup> It is approximate £11 million.

<sup>26</sup> The BMTA route is mainly parallel to the TAT route of the nine royal temples but *Traimitr wittayaram* temple was selected instead of *Sa ked woramahavihara* temple due to the BMTA designating bus direction. So, the route includes *Chanasongkram* temple, *Bawornniwetvihara* temple, *Phrasrirattanasatsadaram* temple, *Suthatthepwararam* temple, *Traimitr wittayaram* temple, *Rakhangkhosittaram* temple, *Arunratchawararam* temple, *Kallayanamitr* temple, and *Chetuphon wimolmangkararam* temple.

<sup>27</sup> “*Wai Phra Haa Wat Chom Sam Talad Nam*” (Paying homage to the Buddha at the five temples in Bangkok and travelling to the three floating markets in *Nakorn Pathom*; ไหว้พระห้าวัด ชมสามตลาดน้ำ) includes *Taling chan* temple, *Saphan* temple, *Takien* temple, *Indrawat* temple, *Samorn kot* temple, *Taling chan* floating market, *Takien* floating market, *Klong latmayom* floating market, and *Ban Phiphittaphan* (Jarima 2014: 72)

<sup>28</sup> It is approximate £7.8.

<sup>29</sup> Interviewing Prayoon Chuakeaw, the director of BMTA, on 27 May 2016.

Island. The BMTA organiser designated the central bus stop at *Sanam Luang* (the Royal Grand Field, nearby the Royal Palace; สนามหลวง).

In 2008, the Chao Phraya Express Boat Company promoted ‘*Long Reua Wai Phra Kao Wat Serm Sirimongkhon*’ (‘Cruising for paying homage to the Buddha at the nine riverine temples for auspiciousness’; ล่องเรือไหว้พระเก้าวัดเสริมสิริมงคล). The organiser selected the temples’ list from their location and facilities. The nine temples for instance situated along the banks of Chao Phraya River and had sufficient amenities such as clean toilets and standard pier <sup>30</sup>. The campaign has been held on Sundays since January 2008. The ticket cost 499 baht for an adult and 399 baht for a child <sup>31</sup>. The package includes lunch meal and drinks. The riverine route promoted gained so much public attention that the company added more routes on special occasions such as *Wai Phra Kao Wat* on Chinese New Year in 2010 (‘paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples on Chinese New year celebration’), *Long Reua Wai Phra Kao Sing Saksit Serm Duangchata* in 2011 (‘Cruising for paying homage to the Buddha and nine sacred things for good fortune’; ล่องเรือไหว้พระเก้าสิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์เสริมดวงชะตา), *Wai Phra Kao Wat Serm Duangchata tee Kor Kret* in *Nonthaburi* province in 2012 (‘Paying homage to the nine temples for good fortune at *Kor Kret* in *Nonthaburi* province’; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดเสริมดวงชะตาที่เกาะเกร็ด จังหวัดนนทบุรี).

In 2010, the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture promoted ‘*wai phra kao wat kao ratchakarn*’ (paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal patronage temples of *Chakri* dynasty; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดแก้วรัชกาล). The organiser promoted the route on the occasion of celebrating Sambuddha jayanthi or known in Thai as *Buddhajanti* (พุทธชยันตี), the 2,600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buddha’s enlightenment by replicating the TAT’s 2002 model. The objective of the campaign was to invite Thais to visit the nine royal temples under the patronage of the *Chakri* dynasty. The organiser offered free transport by air-conditioned buses. Later, the Department of Religious Affairs held the practice on Buddhist public holidays like Makhabucha day, Visakhabucha day, and Asalhabucha day. Based on an interview<sup>32</sup>, the practice proved to be so popular that the amulets offered as gifts (ของที่ระลึก) were insufficient for all participants. Once, it led to a quarrel between a member of staff and some participants.

<sup>30</sup> Interviewing Narin, the officer of Chao Phraya Express Boat company, on 3 February 2016.

<sup>31</sup> It is approximate £10.85 and £8.67 respectively.

<sup>32</sup> Interviewing a 30-year-old woman at *Suthat thepwararam woramahavihara* temple on 8 November 2015.



In 2011 – 2012, BMA promoted ‘*rod rang wai phra kao wat*’ (‘rubber-tired trams<sup>33</sup> for paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples’; รถรางไหว้พระเก้าวัด). The practice was held on 1 – 9 January 2011 from 8.30 to 16.00. Participants could get free tickets from Bangkok City Hall. The tramline began at Bangkok City Hall and stopped at the nine temples based on the 2004 TAT route<sup>34</sup>.

In 2013, Suraphon Sawetseranee, the TAT governor, promoted the campaign ‘*Tiew free mee jing*’ (‘Free travel is available’; เที่ยวฟรี...มีจริง). He took the people who won the free-ticket prize from the TAT activity together with the press to travel on the route, ‘*wai phra kao wat long mae nam chao phraya*’ (Cruising for paying homage to the Buddha at the nine riverine temples along Chao Phraya River; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดล่องแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา)<sup>35</sup>. TAT cooperated with the Express Boat Company and local crossing boats launched this latest route aiming to embrace the religious tourism during the Lent season of 2013 (Jarima 2014: 70-71).

In 2014, TAT promoted four routes destinations of *wai phra kao wat* during Songkran festival (11 – 12 April) <sup>36</sup>. They included: a) ‘*wai phra khor porn kao phra aram luang rob kor rattanakosin*’ (‘Paying homage to the Buddha for blessing at the nine royal temples around Rattanakosin Island’; ไหว้พระขอพรเก้าพระอารามหลวงรอบเกาะรัตนโกสินทร์), b) ‘*wai phra wat kao ratchakarn*’ (‘Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples under the patronage of Chakri dynasty’; ไหว้พระวัดเก้ารัชกาล), c) ‘*wai phra kao wat long mae nam chao phraya*’ (‘Cruising for paying homage to the Buddha at the nine riverine temples along Chao Phraya River’; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดล่องแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา), and d) ‘*wai phra kao wat wai kasat kao phra ong*’ (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples together with revering the nine Chakri kings; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดไหว้กษัตริย์เก้าพระองค์). TAT selected the four most successful routes that were once organised to promote again in this year. According to the interview with one member of TAT<sup>37</sup>,

<sup>33</sup> Tram is a traditional means of transportation in Thailand in the period of King Rama V. In 2011, the BMA offered tram for tourists sightseeing around the centre of Bangkok on the special occasions. Nowadays, there is no longer tram service in Thailand due to the conflict between the tram provider and the department of land transport (www.prbangkok.com, available online: 10 July 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Cited in <http://www2.manager.co.th/Crime/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000184329>, available online: 6 January 2016)

<sup>35</sup> The nine destinations consist of *Kallayanamitr* temple, *Arun Ratchawararam* temple, *Rakhang kosittaram* temple, *Amarindraram* temple, *Srisudaram* temple, *Karuehabodee* temple, *Rajadhiwat* temple, *Devaratkunshorn* temple, and *Yannawa* temple.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in <http://www.manager.co.th/travel/viewnews.aspx?NewsID=9570000039961> (Accessed online: 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2016)

<sup>37</sup> Interviewing a promoting tourism officer 6, TAT on 20 January 2015.

Nowadays *wai phra kao wat* is already well accepted and rooted in Thai perception. In other words, *it has become a norm for modern Bangkokians*. Without large promotion, the popular routes of *wai phra kao wat* like *wai phra kao phra aram luang* (paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples) and *wai phra kao wat kao ratchakarn* (paying homage to the nine royal temples under the patronage of Chakri dynasty) have been selected and well supported by Thai people. To some extent, TAT's recent mission aims to expand the *wai phra kao wat* model to promote similar programmes in suburban and rural areas. So, in 2015, the TAT begins to demote its position from the main organiser to a co-organiser and allows the Ministry of Culture to hold *wai phra kao wat* (paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples) in Bangkok.

Apart from establishing the 'new' norm of modern Bangkokians, the fertility of *wai phra kao wat* suggests the prominence of the practice has been employed to bolster socio-political affairs of the state. *Wai phra kao wat* was suddenly engaged with the monarchical theme at the same period of the 2014 military coup in Thailand. Thai nationalism is made explicit in the establishment of the triad of nation, religion, and monarchy as an integral element of *wai phra kao wat* practice. This is further evident in the way that the Thai government attempted to reinforce the dominant power over Buddhism in order to bring peace. Administrative projects and state sponsorship were part of a hidden agenda to return legitimacy and confidence to the state. Arguably, the military regime exerts the power to legitimise *wai phra kao wat* by sponsoring the practice. *Wai phra kao wat* then provides the non-violent boundary to regain the military reputation and bring the social cohesion after the coup. Moreover, I argue that *wai phra kao wat* potentially boosts the relationship between citizens and the state by cooperating with Buddhism.

In conclusion, the original background and development of *wai phra kao wat* follows, and to some degree influences, sociocultural dynamic changes in wider Thai society in the last 30 years. The practice portrays the significant relationships between religio-cultural and political adaptation and complex social authorities. *Wai phra kao wat* nowadays enjoys support and sanction from the state organisations in Thailand in response to the rapid urbanisation and socio-economic change. Within the force of capitalism, cultural variation including religious practice is converted into a commodity to serve the new market system. Both private and public agents strive to increase the economic value of 'cultural capital' ('*toon thang watthanatham*'; ทูนทางวัฒนธรรม).

Buddhism considered as a part of Thai culture is exploited to present Thai identity and ‘Thainess’ (*‘kwam pen thai’*; ความเป็นไทย). The Ministry of Culture and conservative groups attempt to manipulate cultural adaptation in appropriateness by designating cultural policies and strategies. Then, the dilemma between development and preservation of ‘culture’ is persistently controversial regarding the moral appropriateness. As illustrated by the multiple examples of *wai phra kao wat*, although many people are aware of the crisis of sociocultural and religious exploitation, the development of *wai phra kao wat* is still widely perceived as a new form of pilgrimage in modern Thai period. Consequently, the complex features of *wai phra kao wat* have been consistently adapted to respond to emerging social circumstances exemplified by the annual promotions, themes, purposes, roles, forms, and even participants’ reactions.

### *Wai Phra Kao Wat routes in 2015 – 2016*

In this section, I will give a detailed description about routes and destinations of *wai phra kao wat* organised in 2015 – 2016 that I have prioritised in this study. The empirical information is from my fieldwork in Bangkok from September 2015 to August 2016. The individual route’s description includes the main organiser(s), the theme(s) or purpose(s), the temples’ list, the budget, the transporting facilities, and the historical or legendary beliefs grounded in the temples’ significance.

Due to the various destinations of *wai phra kao wat*, I will categorise these into two main groups based on the main organisers: public authorities and private agencies respectively. The former includes the routes organised by the Religious Affairs department, the Ministry of Culture of Thailand, and TAT. The latter includes the routes organised by transporting companies in Bangkok such as BMTA, Chao Phraya River Cruise Company, The Bangkok Mass Transit System Public Company Limited (BTS skytrain company) and private tourist agencies. Nevertheless, the public authorities employed different means of transportation listed above to promote their specific themes as well as special activities on the individual occasions. The list of transporting companies will also appear in the former groups as transportation providers. Additionally, I also discuss the extent of the virtual models of pilgrimage at the end of this section to illustrate the development of *wai phra kao wat* and its social engagement in the recent period.

*The routes organised by public authorities*

According to the 2015 policy of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan O-cha, sponsoring Buddhism and other religions to develop morality and ethics as well as to sustainably forge reconciliation in Thai society has become a principal strategy of the recent government (The Religious Affairs department 2015: 1). In 2015 – 2016, the Religious Affairs department of the Ministry of Culture, the main public organiser of wai phra kao wat, responded by proposing the project, ‘*Khrongkarn Songserm Karnthongthiew Senthang Sawangboon Nai Miti Tang Satsana*’ (The project of sponsoring pilgrimage tourism from the religious perspective; โครงการส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเส้นทางแสวงบุญในมิติทางศาสนา). The objectives of the project are to promote pilgrimage routes around Thailand by designating them as religious-based tourism. The Religious Affairs department (2015) defines temples as ‘potential social capital’ (‘*toon tang sangkom teemee sakkayapab*’; ศูนย์ทางสังคมที่มีศักยภาพ) because of the sociocultural and economic values embedded in *wats* (Thai temples). For example, *wats* can attract a large number of tourists both domestic and international to have shared experiences of historical events and exotic architectural styles. Meanwhile, the tourists spend money on services which generate income to local communities. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* around Rattanakosin island, the historical centre of Bangkok, is addressed as one of the recommended pilgrimage-tourism routes. The Rattanakosin Island routes have been promoted via two destinations: a mainland route and a route along Chao Phraya River.

The land route was named ‘*wai phra kao wat jit pong jai sang bun suk jai*’ (‘paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples: making merit for spiritual purification and mental happiness’; ไหว้พระเก้าวัด จิตผ่องใจสร้างบุญ สุขใจ). Cooperating with BMTA, the organisers provided forty free buses rides for people during the Buddhist weeks, which are normally held on the holy Buddhist days in Thailand. Each bus departs every forty minutes from 8 am to 5 pm. The departing stop is located at the Royal Grand Field (*Sanam Luang*; สนามหลวง). The buses stopped at the nine stops in the vicinities of each temple’s main entrance. Participants spent five to ten minutes walking to each destination. A BMTA bus conductor said <sup>38</sup>, ‘It was very convenient to use BMTA free bus service. Participants just queued at any one of the nine bus stops. You could hop on and off at any stops as you wished. If you could not complete the journey in a day, you could continue

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<sup>38</sup> Interviewing at the bus stop near the Royal Grand Field on 15 May 2016.

the journey on the next day or until the last day of the campaign'. The nine temples destinations of BMTA is selected considering significant historical background and the location where situated around Rattanakosin Island<sup>39</sup>. The nine temples on the Rattanakosin route are:

- 1) *Rachabophit Sathitmahasimaram* temple (วัดราชบพิธสถิตมหาสีมาราม)
- 2) *Suthat Thepwararam* temple (วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม)
- 3) *Rachanaddaram* temple (วัดราชนัคดาราม)
- 4) *Sa ked* temple (วัดสระเกศ)
- 5) *Bawornniwetwihara* temple (วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร)
- 6) *Chanasongkram* temple (วัดชนะสงคราม)
- 7) *Chetupon Wimonmankararam* temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม)
- 8) *Phrasri Rattana Sasadaram* temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม)
- 9) *Mahathat Yuwaratrangsarit* temple (วัดมหาธาตุยุวราชรังสฤษฎิ์)

The riverine route was '*Long Ruea Kao Wat Dai Bun... Pen Mongkhon Chivit*' (Cruising to the nine temples gains merit and leads to the auspicious life; ล่องเรือแก้ววัด ใต้น้ำ... เป็นมงคลชีวิต) (The Religious Affairs department 2015: 30 – 36). The nine temples located along the banks of Chao Phraya River that covers Bangkok and Nonthaburi areas. The aim is to worship the Buddha and sacred objects at the nine temples as well as to have shared experience of the lifestyles of local Thais who live along the Chao Phraya River, the major river in the central part of Thailand. The Religious Affairs department provides free express boats from Chao Phraya Express Boat Company to serve participants on the riverine route. The list of the temples includes:

- 1) *Amarindhararam* temple (วัดอมรินทราราม)
- 2) *Arun Ratchawararam* temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)
- 3) *Bukkalow* temple (วัดบุคคโล)
- 4) *Chalermphrakiet* temple (in Nonthaburi province) (วัดเฉลิมพระเกียรติ จังหวัดนนทบุรี)
- 5) *Kallayanamitr* temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร)

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<sup>39</sup> Interviewing Prayoon Chaukaew, the director of BMTA, on 20 January 2016.

- 6) *Paramaiyikawas* temple (in Nonthaburi province) (วัดปรมัยยิกาวาส จังหวัดนนทบุรี)
- 7) *Rakhang Khositaram* temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม)
- 8) *Rachadhiwat Waravihara* temple (วัดราชาธิวาสวรวิหาร)
- 9) *Yannawa* temple (วัดยานนาวา)

However, the specific theme officially promoted in Bangkok 2015 – 2016 was ‘*Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn*’ (‘Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples for the lasting prosperity of the nine royal monarchs in *Chakri* dynasty’; ไหว้พระ9วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์รัชกาล). The synergies between Buddhism and state’s sponsorship signify a ‘construed’ application attempting to establish national solidarity as a core value of Buddhist institutions. *Wai phra kao wat* was selected to bolster the authority of non-democratically elected government. This theme has made explicit the close relations between religion and Thai government in collaboration with other public organisations including the Religious Affairs department, the Ministry of Culture, the Fine Arts department, the Cultural Promotion department, the *Banditpatanasilpa* Institute, *Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn* Anthropology Center, Moral Promotion Center, Royal Thai Police, the Department of Tourism, BMTA, and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration sponsored this campaign. The thematic practice was held and promoted on various occasions. For example, the practice was promoted during New Year’s festival 2016 (from 31 December 2015 to 2 January 2016) by identifying it as a New Year’s gift from Thai government to Thai people <sup>40</sup>. Additionally, another objective was to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the longest reigning monarch of His Royal Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (king Rama IX). By doing this, the Thai government required the Religious Affairs department to publicly organise Buddhist activities as a means of revering the monarchical institution. Consequently, the Religious Affairs department, the main organizer, selected the route of the nine royal temples under the patronage of Chakri dynasty to promote the campaign. According to my interview of Srinuan Lapkittaro, the senior scholar of the Ministry of Culture <sup>41</sup>, ‘These royal temples of the king Rama I – VIII are identified as the temples where individual kings’ relics are preserved after the completion of their cremation ceremonies whereas the royal temples of the king Rama IX

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<sup>40</sup> The Ministry of Culture.

[https://www.m-culture.go.th/th/ewt\\_news.php?nid=1010&filename=index](https://www.m-culture.go.th/th/ewt_news.php?nid=1010&filename=index). (Accessed online 31 December 2015)

<sup>41</sup> Interviewed on 2 April 2016.

is identified from the temple in which he inspired to establish. The temples' list includes<sup>42</sup>:

- 1) *Chetuphon Wimonmangkhararam* temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม)
- 2) *Arun Ratchawararam* temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)
- 3) *Racha Orasaram* temple (วัดราชโอรสาราม)
- 4) *Racha Pradit Satitmahasimaram* temple (วัดราชประดิษฐ์สถิตมหาสีมาราม)
- 5) *Benjamabophit Dusitwanaram* temple (วัดเบญจมบพิตรดุสิตวนาราม)
- 6) *Baworn Niwet Vihara* temple (วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร)
- 7) *Racha Bophit Satitmahasimaram* temple (วัดราชบพิธสถิตมหาสีมาราม)
- 8) *Suthat Thepwararan* temple (วัดสุทัศน์เทพวราราม)
- 9) *Rama 9 Kanchanaphisek* temple (วัดพระรามเก้ากาญจนาภิเษก)

‘*Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn*’ (‘Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples for the lasting prosperity of the nine royal monarchs in *Chakri* dynasty’; ไหว้พระ๙วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์รัชกาล) has been repeatedly promoted on holy Buddhist festivals in Thailand such as *Vesakhabucha* (14 – 20 May 2016), *Asalahabucha* day and Lent day (19 – 20 July 2016). In addition, this campaign was also held during the celebration of the 234<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rattanakosin* City under Royal Benevolence on 20 – 24 April 2016. During *Vesakhabucha* day, the Religious Affairs department of the Ministry of Culture also held a ‘mocking miniature’ route of wai phra kao wat to promote this practice at the Royal Grand Field (*Sanamluang*; สนามหลวง). To clarify this, the replicas of the Buddhist images from the nine royal temples are situated on a set of altars for worshipping, under a large white tent which is about 100 square metres. At the entrance, a long table provided flowers, incense sticks and candles for offering. Participants can donate money in a box and bring the selected offerings to pay homage to the Buddha. Thai-styled decorated partitions are set to symbolically indicate each temple’s area. In front of each block, there are signboards indicating the historical information relating to the significance of the individual temples. Most participants were likely to start worshipping from the king Rama I’s temple to the king Rama IX’s temple, which signifies the completion of the practice.

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<sup>42</sup> The list of the temples was chronologically arranged from the order of the nine reigns of Chakri dynasty.



Figure 2.7: Wai phra kao wat at the Royal Grand Field (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Meanwhile, another special theme is ‘*Long Reua Chao Phraya Sai Nathee Hang Sattha Im Bun Suk Jai*’ (Cruising for meritorious virtues and mental happiness along Chao Phraya River, the river of faith; ล่องเรือเจ้าพระยา สายนทีแห่งศรัทธา อิ่มบุญ สุขใจ). Participants can travel free of charge using the Chao Phraya Express boat sponsored by the Religious Affairs department and Chao Phraya Cruise Company. The boat leaves from the *Kallayanamitr* temple’s pier every thirty minutes from 8.30 am to 4 pm. The campaign has been promoted twice on *Makhabucha* (16-22 February 2016) and *Vesakhabucha* (14-20 May 2016) on the following route:

- 1) *Arun Ratchawararam* temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)
- 2) *Dhevarajkulchorn* temple (วัดเทพราชกุญชร)
- 3) *Kallayanamitr* temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร)
- 4) *Kharuehabodee* temple (วัดคฤหบดี)
- 5) *Racha Singkhorn* temple (วัดราชสิงขร)
- 6) *Rachathiwat* temple (วัดราชโอรสาราม)
- 7) *Rakhang Khositaram* temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม)
- 8) *Worrajanyawat* temple (วัดวรจรรย์)
- 9) *Yannawa* temple (วัดยานนาวา)

In 2015 – 2016, *wai phra kao wat* organised by the Religious Affairs department offered participants a brochure consisting of a map, the brief description of the practice, temple information, and stamping boxes. Participants could collect stamps provided at



the nine temple sites from the service information tables. They could start collecting from any temples on the route. Once they completed the nine stamps, they could exchange the record for a Bodhi leaf from India offering as a gift upon reaching their final destination. The staff would sign their names, keep the brochure as evidence, and gave participants a gift. According to my interview of Srinuan Lapkittaro <sup>43</sup>, the senior scholar of the Ministry of Culture, ‘In 2015, the Religious Affairs department sponsored the pilgrimage route at the four greatest places of the Buddha in India. The officers took a large number of monks from over the country to make a pilgrimage at the holy sites of India. Due to the sponsorship, the Buddhist institutes of India provided us with Bodhi leaves, which are believed to be auspicious. We then wanted to distribute pho leaves as gifts for pilgrims of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok’.

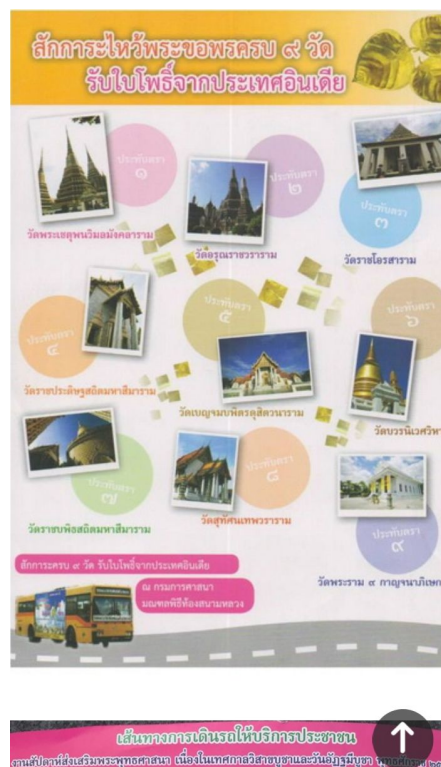


Figure 2.8: A brochure of *wai phra kao wat* (source: the Religious Affairs department in 2016)

Although *wai phra kao wat* has been promoted on different routes and organisers throughout the year, it is noticeable that when I asked participants about *wai phra kao wat* destinations, most participants often mentioned the route by TAT in 2004. As I previously mentioned, TAT in cooperation with BMA promoted *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok since 2002, when it included not only temples but also sacred shrines such as

<sup>43</sup> Interviewed on 2 April 2016.

the City Pillar Shrine of Bangkok and Tiger shrine. The 2004 TAT routes is still considered as the most famous route of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok. Accordingly, tourist agencies and independent tourists or pilgrims favour this route to complete the modern pilgrimage activity. Another reason which accounts for the popularity of the TAT 2004 route is that these nine-temple names all carry positive and auspicious meanings, from a Thai perspective (Ekarin 2014). I will further discuss the connections between rhetorical power and temple names in Thai perception again in chapter 5. The nine temples by TAT 2004 include:

- 1) *Arun Ratchawararam* temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)
- 2) *Baworn Niwetvihara* temple (วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร)
- 3) *Chanasongkram* temple (วัดชนะสงคราม)
- 4) *Chetuphon Wimonmangkararam* temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม)
- 5) *Kallayanamitr* temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร)
- 6) *Phrasri Rattana Satsadaram* temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม)
- 7) *Rakhang Khositaram* temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม)
- 8) *Sa-ked Woramahavihara* temple (วัดสระเกศวรมหาวิหาร)
- 9) *Suthat Thepwararam* temple (วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม)

The latest TAT campaign is ‘Bike by the river’. Although all of the specific destinations are not temples, half of the checking points are the temples arranged in TAT 2004 route <sup>44</sup>. The activity was held during Songkran festival (13 – 15 April 2016). Collaborating with the Royal Thai Navy, TAT promoted the 12-kilometre bike tour route. Bikers and participants had to register and pedal off from *Kallayanamitr* temple because the permission into some destination areas such as the Royal Thai Navy and *Thonburi* Palace was required. The practice was inspired from the successful campaigns of ‘Bike for Mom’ (*pun pheua mae*, ปั่นเพื่อแม่) and ‘Bike for Dad’ (*pun pheua phor*, ปั่นเพื่อพ่อ) in 2015 <sup>45</sup>. Nowadays, bicycle riding has become a trendy activity for middle class Thais. Accordingly, TAT collaborated with the committee of BMA and the Thai government held this special route only on this occasion.

<sup>44</sup> The route includes *Kallayanamitr* temple, *Prayurawongsawat* temple, *Chetuphon wimolmangkalaram* temple, and *Arun ratchawararam* temple.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Bike for Dad’ and ‘Bike for Mom’ aim to celebrate birthdays of the King Rama 9 and Queen *Sirikit*. They were held on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015 and 11<sup>th</sup> December 2015 respectively.

### *The routes organised by private agencies*

Public transportation authorities in Bangkok including BMTA, Chao Phraya River Cruise Company, BTS skytrain company promote *wai phra kao wat* by associating these with their normal service lines. Originally, BMTA and Chao Phraya Cruise Company promoted *wai phra kao wat* as a day trip in Bangkok. The former provided free service for participants whereas the latter provided both non-charging and charging trips.

Apart from providing the free buses for the Ministry of Culture, BMTA also promoted *wai phra kao wat* route entitled ‘*Wai Phra Kao Wat Rob Kor Rattanakosin*’ (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples around Rattanakosin Island; ไหว้พระเก้า วัดรอบเกาะรัตนโกสินทร์). BMTA provided 20 free buses to take people to destinations. In the past decade, BMTA supported the buses taking people to the journey every Sunday. However, the activity recently has been held only on the holy Buddhist days such as *Makhabucha* day, *Visakhabucha* day and *Asalahabucha* day. The practice was promoted parallel to the official campaign of the Ministry of Culture. *Wai phra kao wat* by BMTA is more consistently organised than any other campaign (Sakon 2010: 168). The day trip of nine temples around Rattanakosin Island includes:

- 1) *Bawornniwet Woravihara* temple (วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร)
- 2) *Benjamabophit* temple (วัดเบญจมบพิตร)
- 3) *Chanasongkram* temple (วัดชนะสงคราม)
- 4) *Chetuphon wimolmangkararam* temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม)
- 5) *Phrasrirattana Sasadaram* temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม)
- 6) *Mahathat yuwaratrasasid* temple (วัดมหาธาตุยุวราชรังสฤษฎิ์)
- 7) *Sa ked Rajchaworamahavihara* temple (วัดสระเกศราชวรมหาวิหาร)
- 8) *Samphraya* temple (วัดสามพระยา)
- 9) *Suthatthepwararam* temple (วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม)

Nowadays, BMTA adapts *wai phra kao wat* to promote it in rural areas. However, what participants need to pay for the tickets depend on the individual routes selected. The ticket includes transport and staff service fees (Sakon 2010: 224; Wisit 2015). The activity creates income for both BMTA and rural temples with the communities nearby.

The Chao Phraya River Cruise Company promotes *wai phra kao wat* under its campaign ‘*Wai Phra Kao Wat Long Mae Nam Chao Phraya Doi Chao Phraya Cruise*’ (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples along Chao Phraya River by Chao Phraya Cruise; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดล่องแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา โดยเจ้าพระยาวิเวกรัตน์). The company chose the nine temples’ destination situated along the *Chao Phraya River*, paralleling the route of the Chao Phraya Express Boat. The activity has been held on Sundays. The ticket fare is 599 baht a person. The nine riverine temples by Chao Phraya Cruise Company are:

- 1) *Amarinthraram* temple (วัดอมรินทราราม)
- 2) *Arun Ratchawararam* temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)
- 3) *Devaratkunchorn* temple (วัดเทวราชกุญชร)
- 4) *Kallayanamitr* temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร)
- 5) *Kharuehabodi* temple (วัดคฤหบดี)
- 6) *Rachathiwat* temple (วัดราชวิเวก)
- 7) *Rakhang Khosittaram* temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม)
- 8) *Ratchasingkhorn* temple (วัดราชสิงขร)
- 9) *Worachanyawat* temple (วัดวรจรรย์)

On its official website BTS recommends *wai phra kao wat* route by skytrain service as a form of tourism in Bangkok <sup>46</sup>. Also, it provides brief temple information and local beliefs of each temple. However, BTS does not officially organise the pilgrimage tour. Instead, it only recommends how to effectively manage time for travelling to the nine destinations by employing the skytrain service as the effective means of transportation to the nine destinations. The nine temples suggested by BTS are:

- 1) *Arun Ratchawararam* temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)
- 2) *Chanasongkhram* temple (วัดชนะสงคราม)
- 3) *Chetuphon Wimonmangkharam* temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม)
- 4) *Kallayanamitr* temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร)

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<sup>46</sup> The official the BTS website links to the practice: <https://www.bts.co.th/customer/th/06-travel-9temple-01.aspx> (Accessed online: 3 November 2016)

- 5) *Phrasrirattana Sasadaram* temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม)
- 6) *Rakhang Khosittaram* temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม)
- 7) *Sa ked* temple (วัดสระเกศ)
- 8) *Suthat Thepwararam* temple (วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม)
- 9) *Traimitr Wittayaram Woravihara* temple (วัดไตรมิตรวิทยาราม)

The promoting route of *wai phra kao wat* by tourist agencies often imitates the 2002 and 2004 TAT routes which could be said to be the ‘original’ models of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok. However, tourist agencies attracted tourists by creating spiritual-related themes that promise to mitigate the uncertainties of life. For example, Tour Khun Pong, a tourist agency in Bangkok, promoted a tourist package called ‘*tam bun kao wat sa dor krur*’ (Making merits at the nine temples for warding off bad luck; ทำบุญเก้าวัดสะเดาะเคราะห์). The package involved being led around each temple and participating in activities that are supposedly able to defend against malevolent spirits according to the folk belief of each temple <sup>47</sup>. Additionally, there are many celebrities, astrologers and fortunetellers performing as organisers and tourist operators. They often post about their supernatural experiences during *wai phra kao wat* on social media and invited people to join the activity. A late fifties astrologer told me that, ‘*wai phra kao wat* could be considered a “big” merit practice (*boon yai*; บุญใหญ่). Anybody who has an opportunity to do the practice will have a better life. The daily problems will be solved’. Their relationship between astrologers and Thai people regarding the spiritual influencer will be further discussed in chapter 4. Again, to clarify how public authorities organise the routes of *wai phra kao wat*, I summarise the list of temples that are selected as the destinations to participate *wai phra kao wat* organised by both public and private authorities in 2015 – 2016 in the following table:

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<sup>47</sup> Interviewed Khun Pong at Kallayanamitr temple on 16 November 2015.

Destinations	The Religious Affairs department				TAT	BMTA	Chao Phraya River Cruise	BTS
	Mainland		Riverine					
	(a) <sup>48</sup>	(b) <sup>49</sup>	(a) <sup>50</sup>	(b) <sup>51</sup>				
1) <i>Amarindhararam</i> temple (วัดอมรินทราราม)			✓				✓	
2) <i>Arun Ratchawararam</i> temple (วัดอรุณราชวราราม)		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
3) <i>Bawornniwetwihara</i> temple (วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร)		✓			✓	✓		
4) <i>Benjamabophit Dusitwanaram</i> temple (วัดเบญจมบพิตรดุสิตวนาราม)	✓	✓				✓		
5) <i>Bukkalow</i> temple (วัดบุคคโล)			✓					
6) <i>Chalermphrakiet</i> temple (in Nonthaburi province) (วัดเฉลิมพระเกียรติ จังหวัดนนทบุรี)			✓					
7) <i>Chanasongkram</i> temple (วัดชนะสงคราม)	✓				✓	✓		✓
8) <i>Chetupon Wimonmankararam</i> temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลาราม)	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
9) <i>Dhevarajkulchorn</i> temple (วัดเทวราชกุญชร)				✓			✓	

<sup>48</sup> The route's title is 'Wai Phra Kao Wat Jit Pong Jai Sang Bun Suk Jai' (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples: making merit for spiritual purification and mental happiness; ไหว้พระเก้าวัด จิตต่องใจสร้างบุญ สุขใจ).

<sup>49</sup> The route's title is 'Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn' (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the prosperous inheritance of the nine *Chakri* kings; ไหว้พระสวัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์รัชกาล).

<sup>50</sup> The route's title is 'Long Ruea Kao Wat Dai Bun Pen Mongkhon Chivit' (Cruising to the nine temples gains merit that leads to the auspicious life; ล่องเรือเก้าวัด ได้บุญ...เป็นมงคลชีวิต).

<sup>51</sup> The route's title is 'Long Reua Chao Phraya Sai Nathee Hang Sattha Im Bun Suk Jai' (Cruising along Chao Phraya River, the river of faith, for meritorious virtues and mental happiness; ล่องเรือเจ้าพระยา สายนทีแห่งศรัทธา อิ่มบุญ สุขใจ).

10) <i>Kallayanamitr</i> temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตร)			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
11) <i>Kharuehabodee</i> temple (วัดฤๅษบดี)				✓			✓	
12) <i>Mahathat Yuwaratrangsarit</i> temple (วัดมหาธาตุยุวราชรังสฤษฎิ์)	✓					✓		
13) <i>Paramaiyikawas</i> temple (in Nonthaburi province) (วัดปรมัยยิกาวาส จังหวัดนนทบุรี)			✓					
14) <i>Phrasri Rattana Sasadaram</i> temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดาราม)	✓				✓	✓		✓
15) <i>Rachabophit Sathitmahasimaram</i> temple (วัดราชบพิธสถิตมหาสีมาราม)	✓	✓						
16) <i>Rachadhiwat Waravihara</i> temple (วัดราชาธิวาสวรวิหาร)			✓	✓			✓	
17) <i>Racha Pradit Satitmahasimaram</i> temple (วัดราชประดิษฐสถิตมหาสีมา ราม)		✓						
18) <i>Rachanaddaram</i> temple (วัดราชนัลดาราม)	✓	✓						
19) <i>Racha Orasaram</i> temple (วัดราชโอรสาราม)								
20) <i>Racha Singkhorn</i> temple (วัดราชสิงขร)				✓			✓	
21) <i>Rakhang Khositaram</i> temple (วัดระฆังโฆสิตาราม)			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
22) <i>Rama 9 Kanchanaphisek</i> temple (วัดพระรามเก้ากาญจนาภิเษก)		✓						
23) <i>Samphraya</i> temple (วัดสามพระยา)								
24) <i>Sa ked</i> temple (วัดสระเกศ)	✓				✓	✓		✓
25) <i>Suthat Thepwararam</i> temple (วัดสุทัศน์เทพวราราม)	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
26) <i>Traimitr Wittayaram Woravihara</i> temple (วัดไตรมิตรวิทยาราม)								✓

27) <i>Worrajanyawat</i> temple (วัดวรจรยาวาส)				✓			✓	
28) <i>Yannawa</i> temple (วัดยานนาวา)			✓	✓				



### The diversity of *wai phra kao wat* in popular culture

According to the prominence of *wai phra kao wat*, it has also reproduced in many versions in the context of popular culture such as film and online games. Popular culture unlocks people's understanding towards Buddhist meaning in the cultural context. *Wai phra kao wat* in popular culture makes the practice more popular among young adults and children in particular. However, the interpretation of *wai phra kao wat* in forms of popular culture objectifies the religious practice in a form of commodity. Although the practice thus gains more public attention and profitability, it is often opposed as being against traditional Buddhism by conventional Buddhists.

### *Modern pilgrimage and religious tourism*

In contemporary Thailand, the dynamic of religious tourism in recent days is becoming visibly social interest in various terms of economic, religious, cultural, and political significances. Religious tourism has now been incorporated into various social agendas under the support of the state sponsorship. The religious tourism in contemporary Thailand illustrates a new state-oriented instrument. Religious and cultural heritage tourism, for example, generates a huge amount of income to the local communities and the country. The practice convinces more tourists and religious people to see the values of religions as a cultural heritage. The ethical and economic values embedded into the practice can also be exploited to contribute the regime of power to shaping values and norms of the contemporary society as Collins-Kreiner (2010: 450) notes that the number of events and activities is designated to shape norms and values within the modern context. Recognised *wai phra kao wat* as a modern pilgrimage and religious tourism, it illustrates the Buddhism's place within the emergence of modern economy and political advancement. The practice represents the necessity of Buddhism in the contemporary Thai context in which makes explicit connections to day-to-day experiences. It also becomes the significant factor to maintain the Buddhist authority. Meanwhile, the attempt to maintain the coexistence of Buddhism in the contemporary context by providing the sponsorship has led to be an excuse of the state leader to exert power over the organisation of Buddhism and its relevance. *Wai phra kao wat* represents the compelling embodiment of the complex role of religious tourism in contemporary Thai society. Consequently, the

study of religious tourism provides the insightful evidences of the complex of modern society. The creativity and the mobility of the religious tourism potentially reflect the emergence of social circumstances within the contemporary society.

### *Film*

The practice of *wai phra kao wat* was reproduced in a genre of horror film entitled ‘9 wat’ (kao wat, nine temples, เก้าวัด) in 2010. When the film was sold in the American film market, it was renamed as ‘Secret Sunday’. The film questions whether the practice can solve difficulties and improve life and explores the superstitious characteristics of the practice. Associated with *wai phra kao wat*, the practice was applied as the main plot of the film. The protagonists of the film, Nat and Poon are an atheist couple. They are derisive of the belief in any form of supernatural power. In contrast, Nittaya, Nat’s mother, is a religious person. She has strong beliefs in Buddhism and all kinds of superstitions. The night before Poon returns to visit his mother in Chiang Mai, she has a nightmare about her son. She asks him to perform *wai phra kao wat*, as a means of averting potential disaster, to which he begrudgingly agrees. When the couple visits the first temple, they meet a monk named Sujitto and realise that he is a Nat’s old friend. Sujitto then joins the couple on their journey. However, when the couple visits each temple, they refuse to participate in any of the revering practices. For example, they choose merely to check each temple on the list. Along the road trip they begin to experience many mysterious happenings. For example, when they continue to the third temple, Poon is attacked by a child-sized ghost-like figure, a disturbing image of a young boy with several facial burns of his caused by his abusive mother. Later, she is attacked by haunting images of the abuse and the death of the young boy. It makes her believe that she is seeing images of her past life. When they make it to the final temple, Poon realises that the boy she saw was left to die at this temple after his mother’s suicide. When Nat’s mother arrives, she reveals that Sujitto is actually Nat’s twin whom she left at the temple when he was infant in order to cheat kamma. At the end, the film tries to stress that cheating karma by compensating with substantial ‘good’ deeds is impossible. Every life has its own karma.



Figure 2.9: A promotion poster of ‘9 wat’ film (source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1899107/>)

### *Online and miniature model pilgrimages*

Since 2010, and due to the reputation of the practice, *wai phra kao wat* has been formulated into an online game<sup>52</sup>. TAT sponsored this online game by creating cartoon characters that take a *wai phra kao wat* family trip on New Years day. The cartoon characters are *Yai Prik* (ยายปริก), a grandmother; *Na Champ* (น้าจัมป์), an uncle; *Pam* (แพม), a young girl; *Piak* (เปี้ยก), a young boy; *Pa Samlee* (ป้าลำลี), an aunt. On the first page, the administrator provides the objective of *wai phra kao wat* that echoes the TAT promotion slogan; ‘Making a good start is part of success’. Players can choose any character to act as trip leader. Then, the character has to dress up properly to go to the temple. The players can also pick things to offer to the temples and the colours for the Tuk-Tuk, the ubiquitous motorised ‘*samlor*’ (three-wheel) taxi of Bangkok, used to make the trip. Before going to the temple site, the next online page will ask the players to answer five questions based

<sup>52</sup> The website is [www.9wat.net](http://www.9wat.net) (Accessed online 25 June 2016)

on the five precepts of Buddhism called '*Kam Tham Wat Kwam Rai Kard*' (literally 'the questions to measure how bad you are'; คำถามวัดความร้ายกาจ). After completing the quiz the computer will show the result and suggest the players to do *wai phra kao wat* practice as a method to gain honour (*barami*) and simultaneously decrease one's own badness. Players will see a map briefly presenting the location of the nine temples in Bangkok <sup>53</sup> on the next page. The game provides mottos, pictures and names of the Buddhist images in individual temples' pages. When the character completes the practice in each temple, it will show the increasing level of the scale signaling the player's good behaviours. Until the character completes the whole journey, the screen will show the message 'Paying homage to the Buddha and making merit will purify the mind and be a source of awareness (*Sati*), concentration (*Samadhi*), and intellect (*Panya*). Wishing you good luck.'



Figure 2.10: A cartoon character in the online game, *wai phra kao wat* (source: [www.9wat.net](http://www.9wat.net))

<sup>53</sup> The nine temples destination imitated from the TAT route including Wat Kallayanamit, Wat Arun Ratchawararam, Wat Rakhang Kosittaram, Wat Chana Songkram, Wat Baworn Niwet Vihara, Wat Sa-keed Ratchawora mahavihara, Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Wat Phrasri Rattanasasadaram, and Wat Phra Chethuphon Wimon mangkhararam.



Figure 2.11: A brief map of the locations of the nine temples (source: [www.9wat.net](http://www.9wat.net))



Figure 2.11: The blessing message after completing the *wai phra kao wat* trip (source: [www.9wat.net](http://www.9wat.net))

In a similar fashion, the imitation route with scale models of *wai phra kao wat* was set up at the Royal Grand Field on *Vesakhabucha* (14 – 20 May 2016) aiming to celebrate *Buddhajanti*. The Religious Affairs department, the main organiser, held this activity by setting up a large white tent to posit smaller scale replicas of Buddhist images from the nine royal patronage temples. Also, there were large signboards indicating the historical background of the nine temples. By the entrance, there was a long table providing things to offer the Buddha such as flowers and candles and a box to donate money. An officer told me, ‘This activity is aimed at Thai people who lack the time to participate in the full-scale pilgrimage, and who will have an opportunity not only to pay homage the Buddha but also to have a shared experience of *wai phra kao wat* in one place.’



Figure 2.12: A table for selling offerings to the Buddhist images and a donating box at the entrance of the tent (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)



Figure 2.13: A set of altars for worshipping arranged in the tent (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

The diverse routes of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok during 2015 – 2016 testify to the great popularity of this practice as a mass religious-based form of tourism in Thailand.

The practice has become a norm of modern Bangkokians. The practice is widely perceived and rooted in modern Thai perception. *Wai phra kao wat* creates and reshapes traditional practices of Buddhism into a ‘trendy’ kind of tourism in contemporary Thai society. However, the reputation of this practice reflects the contemporary context of Thai society, including not only modern characteristics of Thais but also the ‘modern’ roles that Buddhism assumes in Thai capitalism (that I will further discuss in the next chapter).



## Chapter 3

# The Expansion of Religious Innovation: The Commercialisation of Popular Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand

## Introduction

There is nothing new about Buddhism encountering market forces in the modern Thai economic system. Nevertheless, the interaction of religious cultures and markets has given rise to moralising pronouncements alongside new social values such as secularisation and rationalism. Weller (2008:17) argues that religion in capitalism possibly undermines ‘communitarian ties of kinship and neighbourhood’. The relationship between money and merit accumulation in doctrinal Buddhism is ambiguous. Popular Buddhism, however, has always had some element of financial exchange between the laity and monastic order. Religious practices occurring within the compounds of Buddhist monasteries become conspicuous to bolster economic development in the religious market. The forces of late capitalism, however, has spurred the growth of prosperity-oriented forms of supernatural, ritual worship that have exerted substantial influence over private and public life in contemporary Thai society (Pattana 2008: 3). Symbolic value is determined as the mediation that affects the convergence and divergence of religions and the market. According to Smith (1988: 125 – 126), there exists a ‘double discourse of value’ in which an intrinsic and sacred cultural sphere of value is presumed to revolve independence of an inconsistent and a profane economic sphere of value. Religion as a form of culture can nevertheless come to be considered as a potential commodity. With this in mind, it is necessary to understand the commodifying process of contemporary religious practices, which mostly involve the diversity of sacrality and ‘sacred’ symbols, so as to expand the relationship between ‘prosperity’ Buddhism and socioeconomic and cultural systems in contemporary Thai society.

In the twenty-first century, commodification has continued to spread into crucial dimensions of contemporary Thailand’s religio-cultural forms. For example, religious commodification has produced a spate of prosperity faiths and cult practices principally engaging mundane achievements of wealth and good health. Jackson (2016: 830) argues that prosperity religions often draw support from conventional popular worship and piety.



The dynamism of contemporary forms of Thai Buddhism in the era of global modernity is, I argue, an indication of the adaptation of religion to new economic contexts rather than a distortion of Dhammic principles, as has been suggested by others (Jackson 1989, 2003; Phaisan Visalo 2003; Sulak 1991). For example, Pattana (2008) argues that the symbolic complex of religious goods and services manifests the specific form of economy in ritualised acts, which relies on ‘a source of symbolic capital that acts...to reinforce simultaneously the desire for existential well-being and identity’ (Pattana 2008: 9).

*Wai phra kao wat*, I argue, demonstrates the emergence of the religious innovation in a capitalist society. Although the practice is grounded in the karmic doctrines and merit acquisition, the ‘new’ variety of the activities and their promotion encourage the changing economic environment of contemporary Thailand. *Wai phra kao wat* does not only emphasise the continuing significance of Buddhism and its rituals but also exposes the contemporary commercial values of Buddhism. These ‘new’ variety of the activities engages with wealth, prosperity and mundane desires of people. When the *wai phra kao wat* practice provides the novel synergies of diverse forms of ‘prosperity religion’, it has been promoted as marketable commodities in response to socioeconomic changes in contemporary Thailand.

### The Relationship between Religion and Money from Anthropological Perspective

Approaching from a sociological perspective, Max Weber initially portrayed the mutual and dynamic relationship between religion and economic processes. Following his formulation of an interpretive method for sociology, he stated the interpretation of ‘ultimate’ meaning rendered from the non-rational acceptance of dogmatic propositions embedded in the salvation ethic of a religion (Weber 1963: xlvii – xlviii). Likewise, in *Economy and Society*, Weber (1963: 116 – 117) argued that the human mind is driven to reflect on ethical and religious questions by an inner compulsion to understand the meaningful world and take a position on it. Consequently, although the rational and intellectual are embedded in the development of rational bourgeois capitalism (Keyes 2002: 244), the world is still continuously shaped by the remaining growth of magical and religious forces that is often branded as the dogmas of the major religions. As he noted in the introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*;

For though the development of economic rationalism is partly dependent on rational technique and law, it is at the same time determined by the ability and disposition of men to adopt certain types of practical rational conduct. When these types have been obstructed by spiritual obstacles, the development of rational economic conducts has also met serious inner resistance. The magical and religious forces, and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them, have in the past always been among the most formative influences on conduct.

(Weber 1958: 26 – 27)

In the age of capitalism, Weber adopted an economic model in understanding religion in his accounts of de-mystification (*Entzauberung*) and ‘Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’. Meanwhile religion was supposed to be alien and profane in the emergence of instrumental rationality and modernity, the ambiguous resurgence of religion and capitalism is still obvious in the interpretative framework. The matrix of religion and capitalism has never enjoyed a monopoly (Roberts 1995: 3) as the following statement:

No-one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at this end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well truly be said: ‘specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved’.

(Weber 1958: 181 – 182)

The statement emphasises that the relations between religions and capitalism are intrinsically interwoven. Religious cultures, both shaping and being shaped, have been made explicit in capitalist society. Weber’s interpretative framework was subsequently adopted by Geertz in *the Interpretation of Cultures*, one of the most widely read anthropological studies. Geertz posited interpretive anthropology to formulate methods of ‘cultural analysis’. Although the relations between religion and economy in Geertz’s work tended to be elusive, his ethnographic studies depicted religious capability could intervene and combine itself in various stages of communities. Likewise, religious symbols definitely provided economic significance depending on the meaning interpretation as well as the practical functions in the society. For example, Geertz suggested the relevance of religious belief and economic behavior in a central Javanese town. In *Peddlers and Princes* (1963), Geertz depicts the Muslim reformers in Bali as possessing piousness that placed them in ‘moral tension with society’. Like Weber’s

Calvinists in the West, they had a specific method of approaching religion and economy. The unique attitude of Calvinism's to the world helped mobilise industrial capitalism in the West (Weller 2008: 15). Determined to 'purify' Indonesian Islam, the Balinese reformers displayed 'the typically "Protestant" virtues of industry, frugality, independence and determination in almost excessive abundance' (Geertz 1963: 28). They lived in relative isolation when they moved to a new location. To illustrate, Geertz informed the entry of a 'piously Islamic, market-born-and-bred group of adroit traders' into a Balinese town predominated by an entrenched Hindu hierarchy. Consequently, religion as a cultural system is associated with the complexity of symbols in social reality even they were ephemerally embedded in practices (Asad 1993:32). The symbolic system provides meaning for practices, often considered as economic capital in the social system.

Following Weber, other scholars such as Bellah (1957, 1964, 1965), Spiro (1966: 1163 – 1173, 1970), and Kirsch (1973, 1975, 1982) have depicted the mutual relationship between religious and economic spheres. Weber's thesis has inspired many of these studies. Here, I will review Weberian studies of religions and religiosity in the Asian region. And particularly, the religio-cultural circumstances of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand will be prioritised. The overwhelming relations between religion and economy will further shed light on the emergence of 'new' religious roles in the bourgeois capitalist society.

Following Weber's *Religion of China*, depicting the association between religious values and economy in East Asian society, Bellah (1957), in a study of Japan in the Tokugawa period, employs a Weberian sociological framework. This study presented pre-industrialised cultural influences, including certain religious and political values that preceded the industrialisation Japan had impacts on later economic development. Although the Tokugawa religion did not meet everyone's satisfaction, it served as a causal agent in propagandising values. Bellah then employed the virtues of Western sociological-anthropological frameworks as a new challenge to understanding either the complex relationships of personality and culture, or the cultural influences on the readiness of Asian countries to the age of industrialisation.

In *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, Bellah (1965) further studied Asian religions, especially Islam, from an ethnological approach. His contribution subsequently became a model for other comparative studies on religion and political changes in East, Southeast, and South Asian societies (Keyes 2002: 245). He suggested an interpretation of progress and the significance of religion. He defined progress as 'an increase in the

capacity of a social system to receive and process information from within and without the system and to respond appropriately to it' (Bellah 1965: 170). Religion, whether interested or indifferent to the world, as he argued, tended to be unaffected by the progressive advancement of society. He argued that when the relationship between religion and the world is one of 'creative tension', the transcendental ideals together with the pragmatic ideals of worldly action are both sustained in the religious system (Bellah 1965: 194).

Spiro (1966) studied Buddhism in Southeast Asia. He focused on the practical relationship between Buddhism and Burmese society. By doing this, he conveyed the consumption behaviour of Burmese people from religious expenditures such as sponsoring ordination and constructing monasteries and pagodas. He argued that Buddhism in Burma represented a religious disposition of the Burmese to consider temple construction superior to donation. The motivational interpretations of religious performances are frequently anchored in Buddhist values and the religious ends imply the spiritual motivation for religious performances (Spiro 1966: 1164-1165). To clarify this, although most of the Burmese were essentially concerned with the spiritual, their religious behavioural practices actually display a desire of practical benefits such as physical and sensual pleasure. In other words, religious spending is equivalent to a reliable measure of spiritual quality. Such a spending in Burma also manifests the satisfaction of mundane desire such as displays of wealth. Consequently, the ideology of meritorious acquisition is often denigrated as the 'disproportionate' allocation of economic resources in Burmese society.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) postulated the emergence of a 'protestant Buddhism' in Sri Lanka, the trait of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. They argued that the emergence of protestant Buddhism in Sinhalese society was one of the great transformations in Buddhist history (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 241). This transformation, they argue, indicated renewed legitimacy from traditional Buddhism. It also established a fundamental structure of Buddhist social and economic ethics for modern Sri Lankan society (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 242). Initially, the expansion of protestant Buddhism in Sri Lanka was restricted to the middle class. However, due to the development of education and an expanding economy, modern changes emanated from urban centres, and even if changes stemmed from proletarian sources, their larger acceptance required bourgeois validation. The bourgeois culture of protestant Buddhism exerted hegemonic sway over larger areas of the nations (Gombrich

and Obeyesekere 1988: 7-8). The reformation of Theravada Buddhism during social change in Sri Lanka spawned several new movements to acquire legitimacy from traditional Buddhism, they argue, ‘each movement is explicitly perceived as a re-creation of a lost tradition or simply as an old tradition continuing. The tradition in question is “Buddhist”, however that may be defined’ (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 241). Additionally, when the traditional Buddhism in modern Sinhalese society no longer functioned, protestant Buddhism was variously adapted to the spirit religion. As a result, it syncretised rituals for worshipping the gods appropriate to the new social context and brought more Hindu customs into the religious practice (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 450). This process has also been made explicit to Buddhism in Thailand.

The studies mentioned above provide some preceding accounts of religio-economic situations in Asia. The Weberian traits underlying the anthropological studies of religions in Asia indicate the profound relations between religion and economy. Through eras of capitalism and industrialisation, religious roles have spawned several new movements to serve wide ranges of dynamic social changes in contemporary context. However, the continuing growth of religiosity and supernatural cults still explicitly remains an integral part of world religions.

### The hybridity of popular Buddhism

Hybridisation is a term which captures of the mixing of religious practices as well as a new set of practice meanings in modern Thai recognition. I argue that urban Buddhism signifies the ‘hybrid’ condition of contemporary Buddhism in Thailand. The structure of hybridisation presents the associations of the re-enchantment of religiosity and rituals and popular Buddhism in contemporary Thai society. I focus on hybridisation as the principal outlook in order to investigate the wide range of activities that make up *wai phra kao wat* practices. Accordingly, the definition and applications of hybridisation are thoroughly investigated. ‘Hybridity’ is originally a key term in postcolonial discourse to characterise linguistic and political cultures (Pattana 2005: 466). Bakhtin (1981), Bhabha (1994), and Young (1995) emphasise the dynamics and potency of hybridity in exploring different socio-cultural contexts. Although each definition comes from different fields, each contributing scholar creates a well-connected social argument on the term. Bakhtin (1981) identifies hybridisation as ‘a mixture of two social languages within

the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor' (Bakhtin 1981: 358). He categorises hybridity into two types: an intentional hybrid and an unconscious hybrid. The former is the ability to perceive an image of language from another language's viewpoint and the latter is a crucial means for historical life and evolution of all languages (Bakhtin 1981: 358). The languages change 'by means of a mixing of various "languages" within boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language, a single branch' (Bakhtin 1981: 358 – 359). Even though the mixing occurs in different group of such branch, it still remains the same utterance (Bakhtin 1981: 359). This process, as noted by Bakhtin, offers an 'insightful of explanation for cultural phenomena, which are recognised as social utterances' (Pattana 2005: 467).

Considering the practicality of Thai Buddhism, a classic study, *'Essays on Thai Folklore'* by Anuman Rajadhon (1988) argues Thai Buddhism is developed to support new desires of the society. He noted, 'Buddhism in a modified form is the mainspring of the national life. It has developed by slow creation of centuries to meet every new need, formed her ideals, conceptions and safeguard' (Anuman Rajadhon 1988: 40 – 41). Pattana (2005: 461) similarly notes that Thai Buddhism has undergone a significant degree of 'subtle hybridisation', while Tambiah (1970: 351 – 366) refers to the 'parade of supernaturals' that have syncretised with flooding popular religious practices. To examine Thai Buddhism, it is impossible to focus on a particular written text or the essential essence of Theravadin doctrines, because an assemblage of local beliefs, deities from Brahmin and Hinduism, and Chinese cosmologies is usually interwoven with belief and practice.

Hybridity in postcolonial criticism portrays 'a way out of binary thinking, allow[s] the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit[s] a restructuring and destabilising of power' (Prabhu 2007: 1). The framing of hybridisation has been employed to study modern religion in contemporary Thai society since 1990 (Pattana 2005; Taylor 2007; Thongchai 1994). Religious hybridisation is illustrated by the rapid growth of spirit cults, devotions of deities and sacred-figured ceremonies in Buddhist sphere. It generates 'a "third space" where conventional Theravada Buddhism, state, and Sangha authorities, multi-original religious beliefs and the drive for material success in the capitalist market all come to coexist and produce a hybrid moment of religious change' (Pattana 2005: 468). The potential transformation in a 'third' or 'other' space

also gives birth to form various symbols and images into practices (Taylor 2007: 1). The hybrid moment of popular religion in contemporary Thailand gives rise to economic and political transformation. Economically, hybridity transcends the limits of religiosity into a ‘prosperity religion’ or ‘commercialised religiosity’ in the context of capitalism (Pattana 2005: 484). Politically, hybridisation provokes social authorities to pay more attention to the subtlety of religiosity due to its influential and seemingly unnoticed power. Hybridisation of Thai Buddhism permits greater improvisation and fluidity through the invented Buddhist practices. Arguably, hybridisation is the most effective structure to investigate the emergence of *wai phra kao wat*. It becomes a key definition to identify the recent Buddhist structure via the complex of merit-making activities. The hybridisation of this Buddhist practice also potentially encompasses social integration and the resurgence of the interest of socially engaged Buddhism in contemporary context.

### *Wai Phra Kao Wat: Hybridisation of religions in popular Buddhism*

During my fieldwork, I spent time investigating many temples in and around Bangkok. I was often fascinated with the proliferation of model figures of deities, spiritual saints, venerable monks, royal kings, and even charismatic objects in almost every temple. They were mostly situated in the temple grounds or behind the main hall and presented different characters and postures. In contrast, every ‘sacred’ figure was displayed on well-decorated altars together with a huge amount of offerings either hanging on the models or placing on the setting table. A composite crowd of worshippers both Thais and Buddhist foreigners, as I observed, were also there to pray *katha* (‘a magic formula designated for a specific “sacred” figure’; คทา) and ask for blessing. Some of them had handfuls of large sized colorful flower garlands, a pack of incense sticks, and money to show the special preference or gratitude to one of the ‘sacred’ figures. As I interviewed, a late 30 woman participated *wai phra kao wat* in the form of ‘*kae bon*’ (redeeming a vow to the Gods after having received the things they asked for; แกะบน). As she asked the wish from Ganesha, she intended to venerate the statue of Ganesha before continuing to pay homage to the Buddhist image in the main hall as per conventional practice. She then prayed for Ganesha’s enlightenment and made special offerings to his statue.

The fieldwork snippet above presents the hybrid outlook of Buddhism within the contemporary context of Thai society. The diversity of religious deities and spiritual cults

has been continuously mentioned in the study of popular Buddhism for over three decades (Pattana 2005: 468). Following this section, I will categorise the diversification of sacred model figures in other religions and beliefs based on the fieldwork of *wai phra kao wat* into six groups. Finally, I will summarise the distinctive characters of the spiritual diversity in Thai popular Buddhism exemplified from the ethnographic evidence of *wai phra kao wat*.

### *The influence of Thai traditional folk beliefs*

Folk myths and rituals are persistently intertwined as a part of popular Buddhism in an attempt to rationalise practices as well as to describe the connection between the present and the past life (Apilak and Siraporn 2009: 27). The adaptation of the concepts of karma and narrative myths has become additional depiction for unpredictable situations. The influence of deities and spirits (*thep* or *thevada*; เทพ, เทวดา), the guardians of Buddhism, was evident in Phra Sri An Myth, a narrative story in the Buddhist scripture. It explained about the relations between Gautama Buddha (the present Buddha) and Phra Sri An (the forthcoming Buddha) (Apilak and Siraporn 2009: 34). The narrative characters of the deities are far more ‘extraordinary’ than other religious figures. For instance, they were the guardians of the Lord Buddha who protected him until the enlightenment. As a result, the Buddhist practices in Thailand are likely to celebrate the sacredness and efficacy (*kwam saksit*) of deities as the cause of veneration. The supernatural efficacy is believed to be so powerful that they can help people ward off bad spirits and worldly difficulties.

Exemplifying from this outlook, the birth-date guardian deities or *thep pra jam wan kerd*; เทพประจำวันเกิด appear in the legendary *Tamraa Chat Went* (the original textbook about the birth horoscope for astrology; ตำราชาดิเวร) transcribed by So Worasilpa (ส. วรศิลป์). The legend describes the relations of the nine stars in the universe called ‘*Dao Noppakhro*’ (ดาวนพเคราะห์) since the primordial era. The configuration of the stars is associated with the human birth and various phases of life. *Tamraa Chat Went* entails the legendary stories about the origin and the characteristics of the nine planets in the universe representing the deities’ images in different postures, colours, and numbers (Prasirt 2016: 129). Thai astrology is a discipline referring to the impact of stars on human fate and the shifting occurrences that happen on earth. This discipline is offered as a way out of daily



problems to which traditional Buddhism does not offer a solution (Cook 2002: 192). According to the astrological beliefs, the characters of birth-date guardian deities are associated with the personality of people who were born on the corresponding days. Jackson (2016: 855) also notes that ‘in Thai astrology, the day of the week on which one is born is significant, and each person’s auspicious colour is associated with that day’. As a result, when people worship the nine deities, they will refer to the deities’ images and venerating methods in accordance with the original astrological textbook. For example, if your birthday is on Tuesday, you should worship the Buddhist image in reclining posture and employ number eight into venerating practices such as praying 8 repetitions of chants and donating money ending with eight like 18, 28, and 88.

Regarding *wai phra kao wat*, the influence of deities appears in a merit-making practice called ‘*tam boon thep pracham wan kerd*’ (‘making merit with birth-date guardian deities’; ทำบุญเทพประจำวันเกิด). According to astrological beliefs, the characteristics of the planets are explained by deities’ images in different postures. The nine deities consist of seven birth dates, Rahu (the deity that brings inauspicious to life; ราหู), and Ketu (the deity that brings good luck; เกตุ) (Prasirt 2016: 125). The nine deities are arranged on altars with sets of offerings including water and flowers for worshippers in the vicinities of *Arun Ratchawararam* temple, *Kallaya namitr* temple, and *Saked* temple. In *Arun Ratchawararam* temple, for example, the model figures of the nine deities are set on altars with Thai-styled angels printed on the backdrop. In front of each model figure, there are offerings like water and flowers, donating alms, and praying chants for the individual deities corresponding with birth-dates and the amount of repetitions for the chanting. Colouring decoration is also applied differently based on the individual deities. The ‘Rahu’ figure is for worshippers born on Wednesday evening whereas the ‘Ketu’ figure is determined for worshippers who do not know their exact birth date. As I observed, when the participants came to worship the nine deities, they showed respect by performing a ‘*wai*’ to all deities. To their birthday deity, they would kneel down then ‘*krap*’<sup>54</sup> (the salutation for the Buddha and monks), and chants. According to interviews<sup>55</sup>, ‘I did special reverence with this deity because he directly connects with my birth date. I believe that he has power to protect me from bad fortunes and bring me a happy life’.

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<sup>54</sup> ‘*krap*’ (กราบ) is a gesture to show reverence to the Buddha and monks. By doing this, Thais kneel down, put both palms and bend head down on the floor simultaneously. They repeat it three times to signify the respect of Buddha, Dhamma (Buddhist teachings), and monks.

<sup>55</sup> Interview at wat Arun Ratchawararam on 1 January 2016.



Figure 3.14: the nine deities on the altar (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Additionally, traditional knowledge based on local rituals, rites, myths and folk legends is relocalised to motivate the interest of urban Buddhists and tourists towards religious practices. Meanwhile, the relocalisation of traditional knowledge as part of urban Buddhist practices creates the sense of nostalgia about rural experiences that appeal to the fluid migration individuals into Bangkok city (Parnwell and Seeger 2008: 79). For example, when I looked around Arun Ratchawararam temple, I noticed that several rows of cash flags were hung around the main hall. The activity was named, ‘*thamboon tung ngern tung thong*’ (merit making with golden and silver flags; ทำบุญตุงเงินตุงทอง) (Figure 3.15). According to the folk belief of *Lanna* (ล้านนา), the ethnic group in northern Thailand, *tung* (ตุง), a flag of coloured-paper made with *Lanna*-patterned embroidery, is used in northern ritual ceremonies. For example, the *tung* is used in funeral ceremonies in northern regions. *Tung* in the funeral ceremony called ‘*tung sam hang*’ (‘a three-tailed flag’, ตุงสามหาง) is made of white paper with brief details of the deceased. *Tung* is carried in front of a funeral procession to symbolise as the path to the heaven which the deceased must follow (Hall 2015: 351 – 352). *Tung* is also an auspicious symbol for the *Lanna* community. *Lanna* people believe that *tung* is a worshipping material for the Buddha. So, *tung* will be hung around the temple sites on *Phaya wan* day (the last day of Songkran festival, วันพญาวัน). Moreover, *tung* worshipping is traditionally believed to be a way of transferring merit to the deceased as well as to accumulate merits for the next life because

anyone who offered *tung* in this life can touch the rim of *tung* and cling to it to the heaven once the death.

Offering *tung* in urban temples reinterprets the purpose and meaning of *tung*, and the design of the *tung* is also reinvented. Based on the fieldwork, the practice was held during New Year festival (31 December 2015 – 2 January 2016) which is a similar duration of *Lanna* practice. Nevertheless, *tung* here is made from gold-colored paper and decorated with twelve symbolic animals of the zodiac. It consists of many slots made from clear plastic to put banknotes and the name of donors inside. Moreover, offering *tung* in the urban temple is reinterpreted into another meaning which is related to prosperity. This new meritorious practice is named ‘*tung ngern tung thong sib song rasi*’ (golden and silver flags of the twelve zodiacs, ตุงเงินตุงทอง12ราศี). *Tung* in this sense extends to signify an expecting result by associating with the pronunciation /tung/ with a Thai verb form which means collect or accumulate. Accordingly, the promoted objective suggested when you made merit by *tung*, you will be prosperous and wealthy, able to possess valuable materials for your entire life. To participate in this activity, the participants select *tung* from the symbolic animals of their birth year. They then donate 100 baht for a flag row. Then, participants offer money in the slots, write their names, make a wish and hang it around the main hall.



Figure 3.15: *Tung ngern tung thong sib song rasi* at Arun Ratchawararam temple  
(source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Another example of the invented meritorious practices by relating to local knowledge is called '*pha pa loi fah*' (the sky-high monks' robes; ผ้าป่าลอยฟ้า) (Figure 3.16). The activity employs the structures from the two prominent rituals in Thai society: *tod phapa* (The forest robe ceremony occurs anytime after rains retreat (*phansa*; พรรษา); ทอดผ้าป่า) and *yok cho fa* (The ritual ceremony by raising *cho fa*<sup>56</sup> on the temple's roof when a new temple or *bot*<sup>57</sup> is established; ยกช่อฟ้า). Thais believe that *yok cho fa* is one of the most sacred ceremonies because *cho fa* is posited at the zenith of the temple in which is symbolically the closest worldly part to heaven (Darlington 2012:93), the place of the Buddha and heavenly deities. Buddhists consider this practice as '*boon yai*' (yielding substantial merit; บุญใหญ่). As a result, the integral model structure of both traditional Buddhist ceremonies has overwhelming spiritual power. However, instead of offering

<sup>56</sup> '*Cho fa*' is the finest carved apex on the roof of the temple. The figure of '*cho fa*' symbolically represents a crested Naga head based on the myth of Naga in Thai folk belief (Wells 1938: 32).

<sup>57</sup> '*Bot*' (โบสถ์) is the ceremonial hall where situates the main Buddhist image of the temple.

forest robes, *pha pa loi fah* was held for fundraising for the renovation of a giant stupa, the landmark of the temple according to the interview with Phra kru Worrapanya methee<sup>58</sup>, the abbot assistant. *Wai phra kao wat* promoted this activity in form of a ritual ceremony under the title, '*Bucha Mahathat Khu Phra Nakorn Saksit*' ('Worshipping the giant stupas of the sacred land'; บูชามหาธาตุพระนครศรีธรรมราช).

By doing this, participants attach money to a robe tied to the top of the giant stupa. When the robe is full, monks will roll it up to the top of the stupa which is similar to the action of *yok cho fa* ceremony. At first glance, it looked like flag-rowed decoration but is in fact a long row of money. It is noticeable that apart from the structure of *pha pa* ceremony, obviously shown from the picture, participation in this practice were more crowded than another meritorious activity because the descriptive meaning of *phapa loi fah* ideally serves 'double values', preserving a Buddhist heritage site together with acquiring special merit, which satisfies the majority of participants. A 58-year-old woman told me <sup>59</sup>, 'because I believe in meritorious results, this practice can provide me '*boon yai*' ('yeilding substantial merit'; บุญใหญ่) that not everyone will have an opportunity to do'.

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<sup>58</sup> Interviewed on 1 January 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Interviewed on 1 January 2016.



Figure 3.16: *Pha pa loi fah* (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

### *The influence of Brahmanism and Hinduism*

The considerable influence of Brahmanism and Hinduism was evident in ritual components of the Thai royal courts. Commoners then received the model of royal ceremonies and Brahmanistic and Hinduistic practices into folk beliefs, customs, and cult practices (Pattana 2005: 472). The veneration of Indian gods and goddess or celebration of ‘*thep*’ (lord; เทพ) or ‘*thewada*’ (spirit or angel; เทวดา) is not considered incompatible with the Buddhist regime in Thai society. Many Indian shrines in Thailand such as the Erawan Shrine on Ratchaprasong road, Dhevasthan (Brahmin temple) close to the Giant Swing (*sao ching cha*; เสาชิงช้า) in Phra Nakorn district, and Sri Maha Mariamman temple (Indian temple; *wat khaek*; วัดแขก) receive great support from both worshippers and tourists.



Ganesha known to Thai as ‘*Phra Kanesh*’ (พระคณेश) or ‘*Phra Phikhanesh*’ (พระพิฆเนศวร) is one of the most prominent Hindu deities and regularly worshipped in contemporary Thai society. Ganesha is believed to be the remover of difficulties, the lord of success, intellect, and wisdom (Sophana 2015: 35). The prominence of Ganesha in Thai society has been explicit since the reign of King Rama V illustrating from the employment of Ganesha images as the emblems of government offices and institutions such as Fine Arts department of Thailand and Silapakorn University (Sophana 2015: 57).

Ganesha associated with his mystical power is fascinating for worshippers. Replicas of Ganesha models are displayed for veneration in almost every Buddhist temple. Additionally, the characters and specific names of these figures are distinctively ‘invented’ relating to makers and worshipping objectives. For example, Arun Ratchawararam temple built Ganesha in the series ‘*ruay permpoon*’ (‘gaining more wealthy’; รวยเพิ่มพูน) relating to the worshipping objective whereas Suthat Thepwararam temple built Ganesha in series of ‘*chao khun sri (Son)*’ (เจ้าคุณศรีฯ [สน]) relating to the maker’s name. I use the term ‘invented’ because there is no evidence about the various names of Ganesha. Makers are likely to name it for commercialising and specific meaning purposes.



**Figure 3.17: Ganesha (Phra Phikhanesh) from Arun Ratchawararam temple**  
(source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

In *wai phra kao wat*, a statue of Ganesha is situated on the altars behind the grand hall of *Arun Rachawararam Woramahawihara* temple. As visible from the picture above,

the Ganesha figure is fully adorned with marigold garlands based on the folk belief that Ganesha loves yellow as well as the auspicious name of this flower in Thai, ‘*dok dao ruang*<sup>60</sup>’. The temple provides an instruction for worshipping Ganesha. The appropriate worshipping method and chanting words noted, ‘Using nine incensed sticks and a flower garland to worship Ganesha,’ are also available on a yellow board in front of the statue. However, as I observed, groups of participants also offer Ganesha fruits, drinks and money. A late thirties woman who chose to celebrate her New Year by doing *wai phra kao wat* and worshipping Ganesha told me,

*Wai phra kao wat* is a sacred ceremony. The positive implication of the practice attracts me to participate this. I take part in *wai phra kao wat* practice to mark New Year’s day. I feel like I make a “good” start with ‘*kwam kao na*’ (progression; ความก้าวหน้า) [an auspicious ceremony] associated with the symbolic meaning of number nine. I also believe that ‘a good start is half of the success’. When I come here to *wai phra kao wat*, I will not only pay homage to the Buddha but also ask for blessings from Ganesha, the lord of success. So, today I bring him bananas and sugar canes owing to the New Year celebration. I strongly believe that Ganesha will bring me the success throughout the year’, [she smiled]<sup>61</sup>.

The relations between Buddhism, Brahmanism and Hinduism are rooted in Thai ritual activities. They gain mutually support and create less conflict with Buddhism. Almost every temple benefits from the higher number of participants and donating money, whereas the laity and tourists have more choices of activities that possibly make them more confident and cheerful. *Wai phra kao wat* also gains mutual benefit from the diversity of Brahmin and Hinduistic deities established in the sites by applying them in promoting activities.

### *The influence of Chinese deities*

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<sup>60</sup> *Dok dao rueng* or marigold (ดอกดาวเรือง) is one of the favourite flowers for offering in religious rites and practices in Thailand. According to the auspicious meaning of its name, rueng or rung rueng (รุ่งเรือง) refers to advancement and progression. As a result, when Thais offer the marigold garlands, they often pray for the advancement of their life.

<sup>61</sup> Interviewed at Arun Ratchawaram temple on 1 January 2016.



Historically, Chinese immigrants came to Siam in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Keyes 1987). Due to the relative freedom of religion, Chinese people were allowed to perform religious practices including ancestor worship in Siam. Chinese beliefs and cultures then have coexisted and blended into Thai religion in a very harmonious manner, unlike the assimilation problems that Chinese immigrants had in European colonies such as the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina (Pattana 2005: 473). The Chinese people also gave rise to a specific Sino-Thai socioeconomic identity. Accordingly, the Chinese cultures and deities are intertwined and play a major role as the divine spirits which can foster business success and solve financial difficulties (Pattana 2005: 480). Guanyin (the woman Chinese deity; กวนอิม) and Sangkajjai (the future Buddha in Chinese myth; สังกัจจายน์) are the two prominent Chinese deities in Thai society. According to the history of Sangkajjai, his name also appears in the legends of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Nevertheless, some people I talked to identified Sangkajjai as a Chinese deity because his charismatic presence explicitly relates to wealth and prosperity.

In *wai phra kao wat*, Sangkajjai known to Thai '*Phra Sangkajjai*' (the Chinese monk; พระสังกัจจายน์) is situated as a huge model figure in three temples; *Arun Ratchawararam*, *Kallaya namitr*, and *Sa ked*. In *Arun Ratchawararam* temple, for example, *Phra Sangkajjai*'s model is in a golden figure and a slit hole just above his navel to insert coins like a piggy bank. A notice at the bottom of the statue reads, '*Phra Sangkajjai pang phokkhasab; bucha leaw ruay ruay ruay*' (The future Buddha in the 'millionaire' posture; when you worship, you will be rich! rich! rich!; พระสังกัจจายน์ ปางโกกทรัพย์ บูชาแล้วรวย รวย รวย). After tourists and participants donate money, they tended to touch his belly and say "*ruay ruay ruay*" (rich! rich! rich!; รวย รวย รวย). This exemplifies the connection of folk beliefs or legends concerning a figure of devotion and the Buddhist practice used in order to increase economic value. According to the legend, *Phra Sangkajjai* is believed to be the 'deity of prosperity' (*thep hang chok lap*; เทพแห่งโชคลาภ). *Phra Sangkajjai* model as a result is adapted to two main roles. On the one hand, for believers, he is considered a sacred model to revere to attain prosperity; on the other hand, for tourists and visitors, it becomes a mere donation box. This kind of 'invented' religious practice has attracted controversy for its commercialism and moral inappropriateness.



Figure 3.18: Phra Sangkajjai from Arun Ratchawararam temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

### *The influence of Buddhist saints and monks*

Analyses of the spirits of dead venerable monks and saints have appeared in Thai scholarly studies since the nineteenth century (Pattana 2005: 478). Due to the accumulated merit and charismatic qualities manifested during their lifetime, these figures were believed to emanate supernatural power that could rescue people from their bad fortunes and struggles. In the context of *wai phra kao wat*, the charisma (‘*kwam klang*’; ความขลัง) of Buddhist saint and venerable monks in individual temples are associated with the tales of miracles and temple origin legends. The perceived magic and sacred qualities of these monks often influence participants when selecting the *wai phra kao wat* destinations for their personal pilgrimage.

According to the interview with Phra Warapanya Methee, the assistant abbot at Rakhang Kosittaram temple<sup>62</sup>,

The ‘sacredness’ (*kwam saksit*; ความศักดิ์สิทธิ์) of the temple is associated with the supernatural power of the Buddhist saint, *Chao Phra Khun Somdet Buddhajan Toh Phromrangsri* (sometimes also called *Somdet Budhacariya*, *Toh Brahmaransi*, *Luang Pho Toh*; เจ้าพระคุณสมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์ โด พรหมรังสี). He was ordained and appointed as the abbot at *Rakhang Kosittaram* (1852 – 1872). During his monkhood, he created amulets that were famous for the power of charisma (*kwam khleng*; ความขลัง) to the people who possessed them. Many Thai Buddhists have had extraordinary and mysterious experiences from possessing *Luang pho Toh*’s amulets.

Although the belief in miracles and charismatic power is a personal inclination in Thai called, ‘*kwam cheau suan bookkhon*’, ‘the individual belief’; ความเชื่อส่วนบุคคล), the experiences of believers identifying the ‘extraordinary’ power of *Somdet Toh* have been widely known in Thai society for many years. In one case, a 50-year-old woman <sup>63</sup> told me that, ‘I can sense of *Somdet Toh*’s mercifulness (*kwam metta*; ความเมตตา) when I prayed and meditated in the main hall’. Meanwhile, a 48-year-old man <sup>64</sup> said, ‘I once saw *Somdet Toh* appear after I had finished meditation’. Another late thirties woman <sup>65</sup> said that when she prayed and asked for a blessing at *Wat Rakhang*, she would get what she asked for. Overall, the tales of miracle about *Somdet Toh* are so famous in Thai perception that some stories appear in radio and television from time to time. Additionally, the ‘sacredness’ of *Luang Phor Toh* leads to the popularity of his chanting words known in Thai as ‘*Chinnabanchorn khatha*’ (‘The Cage of the Conqueror;’ ชินบัญชรคาถา), a Buddhist chanting written by *Somdet Toh*). Nowadays, it is a ‘must’ activity when visiting the temple. There is a well-known motto that says, ‘*khrai mai suad phra katha Chinnabanchorn tee wat rakhang tue wa ma mai theung*’ (‘If anyone comes to *Wat Rakhang* but doesn’t pray *Chinnabanchorn*, it is as if you never come to this temple; ใครไม่สวดพระคาถาชินบัญชรที่วัดระฆัง ถือ

<sup>62</sup> Interviewed on 25 August 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Interviewed at Rakhang khosittaram temple on 20 February 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Interviewed at Rakhang khosittaram temple on 22 February 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Interviewed at Rakhang khosittaram temple on 18 May 2016.

ว่ามาไม่ถึงวัชรจักร). Accordingly, the example of *Luang Phor Toh* as a source of efficacy and charisma has become incorporated into the identity of the temple.



Figure 3.19: *Luang Phor Toh* taken from Rakhang Khosittaram temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

### *The influence of holy kings*

The veneration of spirits of national heroes, especially dynasty creating kings such as King Taksin, King Chulalongkorn, and Nareasuan Maharaj has become widely popular among Thai Buddhists. For instance, since the late twentieth century when a cult of king Chulalongkorn was recognised as the very first royal spirit cult, he has become a nationwide popular cult figure for religious people (Stengs 2009: 4). Such cults are based in a sense of nostalgia for an imagined paradisiacal past. The veneration of the royal kings in the shrines and temples are associated with their efficacy in warding off bad luck and solving living difficulties.

During fieldwork I found that worshipping King Taksin, the founder of the short-lived Thonburi kingdom, has become a royal cult practice particular to the Thonburi temples such as Arun Ratchawarama and Rakhang Khosittaram. King Taksin (1734 – 1767) was a Sino-Thai king remembered as an important saviour of Thai independence after he defeated the invading Burmese in 1767 (Evans 2002: 169; Stengs 2009: 22 – 23). During this period, he established Thonburi as the capital city of Thai kingdom. King Taksin is widely popular because of his reputation as both the saviour king and as the

charismatic king. Astrologers and fortunetellers often advise that worshipping King Taksin will allow one to succeed in business and turn a comfortable profit.



Figure 3.20: King Taksin from Arun Ratchawararam temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

To illustrate, there is a building in *Arun Ratchawararam* temple's area called '*tamnak phra chao Taksin maharat*' ('The Palace of the Lord Taksin maharacha'; ตำหนักพระเจ้าตากสินมหาราช). It was established near the giant pagoda of *wat Arun*. In the building, a black-steeled statue of King Taksin and a number of his personal belongings during his life such as a large teak seat, a warrior helmet, and a sword are displayed. The participants revered him by offering incensed sticks, flowers, a bar of gold, and money. Ritual activities associated with the charismatic power of King Taksin are also held. An activity is called '*Phiti Yok Dab*' ('Carrying the sword ceremony'; พิธียกดาบ). The sword of King Taksin was used as the symbol of sacredness in this activity. Most participants in this activity ask for good luck before entering the competitive situations such as applying for a new job or offering land sales. Participants meditate and ask for their desires. Then, they carry the sword over their heads and simultaneously say '*chok dee mee chai*' ('good luck and win'; โชคดีมีชัย) signaling the completion of the activity. Another activity is called '*Lod Tan Tee Pratap*' ('Passing through the king's seat'; ลอดแท่นที่ประทับ). The activity aims to repel misfortune. By doing this, the participants crawl under the large teak seat of King Taksin as the cult belief that when you crawl to the other side of the seat, the bad spirits are immediately dispelled as if you are reborn. So, the cults of King Taksin are popular in that they are seen to protect followers from a bad future.



Figure 3.21: King Taksin from the Palace of the Lord Taksin maharacha, Arun Ratchawararam temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

### *The influence of charismatic objects*

The increment of sacred values attributed to the religious objects has become prominent as a part of religious practice in contemporary Thailand. The sanctified objects called ‘*khong khlang*’ (‘charismatic objects’; ของขลัง) are rhetorically associated with supernatural qualities and, nowadays, as features of prosperity religion. As Jackson (1999: 256) has pointed out, such prosperity-oriented forms of worship have expanded in both the conventional domains of Buddhist monasteries and in the commodified spaces of capitalism, where Buddhism is packaged, consumed, and objectified for consumers. As part of its offering for *wai phra kao wat* visitors, *Arun Ratchawararam* temple displayed the alms called ‘*Badhr perd pradoo sawan*’ (‘Alms opens the gate of heaven’; บาตรเปิดประตูสวรรค์). These canonical offerings to monks, robes and bowls, are here presented in a form larger than normal. It was arranged in the same location as the altars of deity’s figures. However, before worshipping other deities, a temple’s spokesman advised worshippers to donate money in the form of alms giving as physical representation to inform the Buddha and deities in heaven to accept good deeds as well as to return with good wishes.





**Figure 3.22: ‘Batr perd pradoo sawan’ (Alms opens the gate of heaven)  
from Arun Ratchawararam temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)**

The creation of sacred objects in the vicinities of temples promoted in *wai phra kao wat* is pervasive in the form of commercialising amulets or sacred objects. I was surprised with this ‘extraordinary’ practice because the alms were named and identified as ‘sacred’ quality equivalent to other deities’ figures. According to a monk I interviewed<sup>66</sup>, ‘the concept of this practice was emulated from the Chinese ritual practice called “*Wai Chao*” (“paying homage to the Chinese deities”; ไหว้เจ้า). When Chinese people visit Chinese shrines, they begin worshipping to “*Tee Gong*” (the Chinese guardian deities of earth and heaven; เทือกง), which is located at the entrance of Chinese shrines. Then, they will walk in to the shrine and worship the main deity’. In a similar fashion to this practice, the participants of *wai phra kao wat* were advised to begin their merit making by donating money in the ‘sacred’ alms box in order to inform heaven of their good deeds. Associated with alms giving practice, alms are necessary for monks to receive offerings from people. The alms also represent a mediator between people in this world and spirits in the other world. Additionally, the action of alms giving represents the belief of meritorious transference to the spirits and the dead.

<sup>66</sup> Interviewed on 4 January 2016.

## The conversion of Karmic doctrine into meritorious practices

Although there are various ‘new’ mixtures of Buddhist practices appearing in the urban monasteries, the doctrines of karma and merit are the two main conceptual ideas that have been proposed in any Buddhist practices and meritorious activities. Karma is regarded as a theory of causation which is ‘psychologically indeterminate’ (Obeyesekere 1968: 21). Karmic theory emphasises the rationalisation and justification of moral virtues and ethical values from the specific characters and actions of religious practices including *wai phra kao wat*. Past actions determine present conditions whereas present actions condition the future. It can be said that no one can alter his own karma. However, karmic theory offers a prescription for a better future through the emphasis on accumulating good karma. Consequently, karmic doctrine is then converted and developed into the processes of merit making including the *wai phra kao wat* practice.

### *Karmic doctrine*

Karma is regarded as a theory of causation which is ‘psychologically indeterminate’ (Obeyesekere 1968: 21). Karmic theory emphasises the rationalisation and justification of moral virtues and ethical values from the specific characters and actions of religious practices including *wai phra kao wat*. Past actions determine present conditions whereas present actions condition the future. It can be said that no one can alter his own karma. However, karmic theory offers a prescription for a better future through the emphasis on accumulating good karma. Consequently, karmic doctrine is then converted and developed into the processes of merit making including the *wai phra kao wat* practice.

In orthodox Theravada Buddhism, karmic doctrine lies behind the variation of Buddhist practices. It is a key concept to explain causes and effects of all religious practices. Karmic description, which mostly appears in Buddhist sacred texts as mythical stories and folk stories, can illustrate philosophical ideas, Dhamma puzzles (*pitsana tham*; ปริศนาธรรม), and complicated issues of canonical Buddhist texts in much easier and approachable terms. According to karmic theory, karma (*kam*; กรรม) refers to deeds or actions in a neutral construct. That is, it can convey either good (*kam dee*; กรรมดี) or merit (*boon*; บุญ) or bad (*kam shua*; กรรมชั่ว or demerit [*bap*; บาป]) depending on the individuals’



intention (*cetana*; เจตนา) (Harvey 2013: 40). Nevertheless, all karmic actions either good or bad are believed to affect one's life course: past, present and future. Karmic force also includes reactions that can take place immediately, after death or even during the next life (Bunnag 1973: 19). One's fortune is then determined by and is alterable only through the karmic process. Karma is widely used to explain individuals' social status, conditions and fates of life (Bunnag 1973: 20). The power of '*boon*' and '*bap*' is acknowledged and becomes a decisive factor in persuading people whether to conform with or defy social conventions. It is perceived as a social norm and widely inculcated, appearing in the Thai cliché, '*tam dee dai dee, tam shua dai shua*' ('doing good gains good, doing bad gains bad'; ทำดีได้ดี ทำชั่วได้ชั่ว). Consequently, karmic doctrine determines the assessment of moral virtues and produces moral criterion that finally rationalises the persistence of merit-making activities in Thai society.

### *Boon and Bap*

*Boon* ('merit'; บุญ) is regarded as the objective of merit making. Although meritorious values is uncertain to confirm 'a desirable state of mind or better rebirth' (Tambiah 1968: 51), *boon* and Buddhist preoccupations still adhere to the highest place and are given priority as the sources of ultimate power in Thai perception (Tambiah 1968:51). Tambiah (1968: 49) notes that *boon* and *bap* constitute the principal ethical norms in Thai society. They conceptualise, assess, and explain individual behaviours. The beliefs of *boon* and *bap* formulate merit-making practice (*tham boon*; ทำบุญ) in order to achieve anticipated good results. Merit-making actions can be divided into two categories associating with the criterion of sociological scope. On one hand are the individual-oriented merit practices, and on the other hand are public-oriented merit practices. The second category has more impact for the community and the state, and this takes shape in many complex ways, such as economic resurgence and socio-political development. Merit making can individually or jointly appear in a great variation of activities. Merit-makers can accumulate beneficial karma by following Buddhist precepts, meditation, chanting Pali words which do not require any cost and even offering a large amount of money or materials to monks and monasteries. Yet, all merit-making agents are usually considered in the collective social context (Tambiah 1968: 52). Leach (1968: 3) argued that meritorious behavior in Thai villages is 'not simply a matter of private morality but

of positive action of a very public kind'. Merit-making practices, which are held as festivals or ceremonies in monasteries, often cooperate with the radical economic and political changes in contemporary Thai society. I argue that *wai phra kao wat* promoted by tourist trades and public authorities suggest the close connection to social circumstances. Apart from providing a new paradigm of merit-making practice, *wai phra kao wat* validates the significance of Buddhism as the driving force of the society. The dynamic of the practice has extended to play upon sociocultural, economic, and political issues in order to find peace and create the moral community.

In case of *wai phra kao wat*, most of meritorious activities promoted at individual temple sites are based on the daily activities of modern urban life. The easier accessibility has been increasing the popularity or new methods of meritorious practices because these practices help individuals visualise the meritorious virtues that they are likely to acquire after participating the practice. For example, making merit with a big post booth called '*tu praisanee boon*' (merit post booth; ตู้ไปรษณีย์บุญ) (Figure 3.23), situated close to the main hall in Arun Ratchawararam temple. The post booth has three separate slots for recipients: 'to father, mother, and grateful people' (บิดา มารดา ผู้มีพระคุณ), 'to male deities and angles' (เทพบุตร, เทวดาประจำตัว), and 'to enemies from former lives and guardian spirits' (เจ้ากรรมนายเวร เจ้าที่ เจ้าทาง). Below these slots, there is an instruction of the practice explaining 'write the name and address of senders and recipients, and then put money in the envelope. Before sending, please make a wish for the recipient(s)'. When tourists and pilgrims spot this, they look excited and enthusiastically join the activity. It is an example of an invented Buddhist practice that adapts a common activity in contemporary social context in order to illustrate the traditional conceptual thinking of merit making. Traditionally, when you desire to pay gratitude to the deceased or a spirit, Buddhists usually offer alms to monks and pour water to dedicate merit to the deceased and a spirit in the otherworld (called in Thai, '*kruad nam utid suankusol*;' กรวดน้ำอุทิศส่วนกุศล). The new form of merit making can easily communicate with contemporary Thais, especially children and teenagers who have no previous experience of merit-making. The question then is how the actual transfer of merit occurs, since traditionally it is done by monks, not by laity. In an interview with Phra maha Bunrung Sathidkeeree <sup>67</sup>, he explained that the monks would bring all donating

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<sup>67</sup> Interviewed on 12 January 2016.

money to do the ceremony for the deceased and ‘*utid suankusol*’ (‘transference of merit’; อุทิศส่วนกุศล) by addressing all names of recipients on the envelopes when they pray on the Buddhist days.



Figure 3.23: Tu Praisanee Boon (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Another example of meritorious activities relating to a modern ritual ceremony is ‘*Sue tee hai phoo tai*’ (buying land for the deceased; ซื้อที่ให้ผู้ตาย) (Figure 3.24). The performance of the practice is imitated from a Buddhist funeral ceremony. The coffin is set up in front of the real funeral pavilion and decorated with flowers, candles and food for the dead on the coffin cover. The practice is held for donating coffins to the dead with no living relatives. Moreover, it is also perceived as a method for warding off bad spirits according to the Chinese calendric year (‘*kae pee chong*’; แก่ปีชง) (Figure 3.25) and increasing personal charisma (*barami*), by securing one’s social status by a donation to those less fortunate. After that the participants write their name on the white paper. They pray and make a wish in front of the coffin before placing the paper on the coffin. After doing this, it is a cult belief that the participants should not look back to the coffin and

move straight away from the place in case the deceased's spirit misunderstands your good intentions and bring misfortunes.

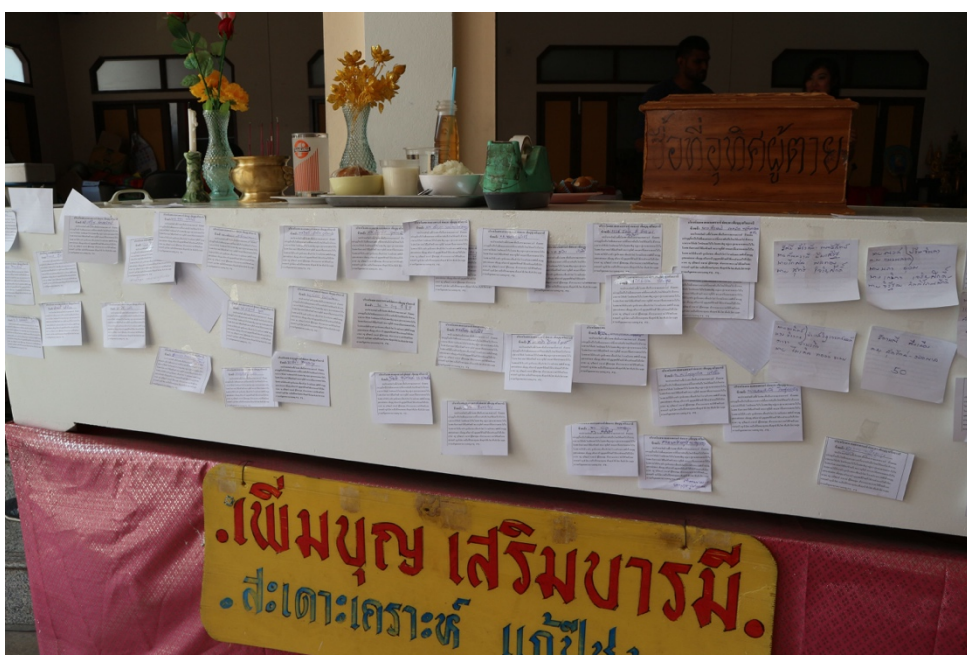


Figure 3.24: the meritorious activity of 'Buy Land for the Deceased' (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)



Figure 3.25: The signboard indicating the details of bad years or 'pee chong' in Chinese calendar and solutions including the wai phra kao wat practice (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

The examples mentioned above illustrate the creation of meritorious activities relating to daily activities. Most participants approach the aims of the individual

meritorious practices from visual images associating with basic knowledge from both ‘new’ and ‘old’ ideas in Thai society.

Several of the objects used in many meritorious activities held in the nine temples have often been construed with ‘new’ meanings. Literally, the offerings engaging with their symbolic characters have been promoted as titles and outcomes of the practices because the organisers aim to elucidate the merit ideology behind each practice. For example, there is a corner outside the main hall at *Arun Ratchawararam* temple and *Rakhang Khositaram* temples called ‘candle donation’ for prolonging life (‘*seub chata*’; สืบชะตา) (Figure 3.36). Participants take part in this activity by donating 49 baht <sup>68</sup> to buy candles. In the site, there are two forms of candles; one is a double candle suitable for someone asking for prolonged life and the other is a candle in a clay tray suitable for asking for prosperity. The participants then write their names on the paper and tie it to the candle. They then make a wish and light the candles and the paper. The act of candle burning symbolises the destruction of negative things by the meritorious virtue of the burning candle. The light of the candle is also said to bring a better life to participants. As interpreted to me by *Phra maha Bunrung Sathidkeeree*, the assistant abbot of *Arun Ratchawararam* temple <sup>69</sup>, the candle is a symbol of lightness and it can burn things out. As a result, when people get a struggle in their lives, they are likely to go to the temple and donate the candles in order to ‘*kae kled*’ (the act of tricking or cheating bad evil spirits; แก้อะเลืด), a Thai cult belief. The symbol of candle relating to the qualification of candle means the lighting power of the future as well as destroying power of the difficulties. Consequently, the temple created this corner for uplifting the spirits of the people and encouraged them to be more confident.

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<sup>68</sup> It is approximate £1.07.

<sup>69</sup> Interviewed on 2 January 2016.





Figure 3.26: Candle merit (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Similarly, several temples on *wai phra kao wat* routes organised meritorious activities by emphasising the linkage of offering things and the outcome of these offerings in order to promote the practice. The promotion of meritorious results impels participants to not only join the activities but also to anticipate a ‘better’ future. For example, the temple promoted the donation entitled ‘*thamboon suea kao-eii hai nang non sabai*’ (‘making merit by donating comfortable chairs and sleeping mats and chairs for sitting and sleeping comfortably’; ทำบุญสื่อ-เก้าอี้ให้นั่งนอนสบาย) (Figure 3.27). To do this, people donate 100 baht <sup>70</sup> for a mat. They write their name on the paper and stick it on the mat. They then offer it to the monks as a dedication (*thawai sangkhathan*; ถวายสังฆทาน).

<sup>70</sup> It is approximate £2.17.



Figure 3.27: Mat merit (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Likewise, the temple offers the meritorious purchase of roof tiles and cement in order to reconstruct temples buildings (Figure 3.28). The temple officer explained that donating construction materials would acquire the merit of good housing and a warm family <sup>71</sup>. By doing this, you can donate as much money as you wish in the box and then write your name and the names of family members on the roof to dedicate merit. The temple officer further explained that once a monk has decided a date, a Buddhist ceremony called ‘*anumothana boon*’ (‘showing acceptance for the good deed’; อนุมโชนาบุญ) will be performed. The monk will confer merit on the donors of the building materials.

<sup>71</sup> Interviewed a temple officer at Arun Ratchawararam temple on 2 January 2016.



Figure 3.28: Temple's Roof Tiles merit (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

Lastly, the temple requested a donation for kitchenware such as dishes, plates, and cutlery (Figure 3.29). To promote the practice, the temple presented the results of this merit as the following: when anyone donates kitchenware, he or she will acquire three meritorious advantages namely the possession of luxury materials, trustworthy followers (including a soul mate, servants and colleagues), and a clever mind that can be immediately applied and functioned when necessary. To attain this, you donate 100 baht<sup>72</sup> for a set of kitchenware. Then you offer them to the monks with the dedication (*thawai sangkhathan*; ถวายสังฆทาน).

<sup>72</sup> It is approximate £2.17.





**Figure 3.29: Kitchenware and Cutlery merit (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)**

The custom of merit making has been ‘reinvented’ by relating folk practices, including beliefs surrounding certain colours and numbers, to the traditional practice of offering meritorious donations to monks. This hybrid strategy creates a prosperity religion that insists on its ability to transfer extraordinary spiritual and material rewards in accordance with the logics of karma, in exchange for ‘occult money’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 314). Visiting *Arun Rachawararam* temple on New Year festival, for instance, you would notice the colourful incense sticks on a long table at the entrance of the main hall. According to Hindu mythology, an auspicious colour assigned to each day of the week is associated with the Brahmanical deity regarded as the protector of those born on that day (Cornwel-Smith 2013: 162 – 165; Jackson 2016: 855; Unaldi 2014: 21). The significance of colours determined in this meritorious activity depicts the cultivating process of popular Buddhism is based on the Brahmanistic ideology. Exemplify from the *wai phra kao wat* practice, each colour of the incense sticks represents groups of participants categorised by their individual birthdate. Like the colours, the amount of incense sticks was individually specified by the sacred number of the individual’s birth date (*‘lek kamlang wan kerd;’* เลขกำลังวันเกิด) based on the conventional text of Thai astrology. For instance, if you were born on Sunday, you worshipped the Buddha by the 6 red-coloured incensed sticks. If you were born on Monday, you worshipped the Buddha by the 15 yellow-coloured incense sticks (Figure 3.30).



**Figure 3.30: Merit with Colour Birth Date-based incense sticks (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)**

Moreover, astrological beliefs are often symbolically related to meritorious practices. For example, offering birth-year candles embroidered with symbolic animals of the twelve zodiacs (Figure 3.31). In this case, it is special that when you donate money for buying worshipping candle, you will get an amulet too.



Figure 3.31: The twelve zodiac candles (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

### Merit making in public sphere

Buddhism and society have become inextricably intertwined in mode of merit-making practices. Such the practices regardless for individual reasons variegates forms of social relationship and at the same time, I argue, create ‘non-violent’ atmosphere in which benefits for peaceful negotiation. According to the study, three forms of relationship grounded in the concept of merit making are discussed. Firstly, merit-making practices show the relationship between laymen and monks. Tambiah (1970: 141) argues the form of relationship between laymen and monks is ‘asymmetrical and symbiotic’. The former character appears in the means to show respect to monks and certain phrases. Traditionally, laymen have to show formal reverence to monks and even novices because as they occupy higher positions based in the hierarchical social order. Laymen then have to conform to certain behavioural expectations in relation to the monks such as talking to them with specific language and showing them respect regardless of age or occupation. (The latter character is exemplified from meritorious actions.) Laymen and monks mutually benefit from meritorious actions. For example, Buddhist householders and laymen can accumulate merit by offering food and necessary materials to monks, performing acts such as *tak bath* (alms giving; ตักบาตร) or *tha wai sangkhathan* (offering gifts to the monks; ถวายสังฆทาน). In a similar way, monks receive food and necessary

materials without paying because they are perceived as being within a ‘field of merit’ and are thus able to confer merit to people (Keyes 1983: 274). When merit-making practices become a daily routine of Buddhists in Thai society, they create close social bonds between monks and householders in the community from their mutually physical and psychological benefits (Bunnag 1973: 79 – 85).

Secondly, merit-making practices show the relationship between monastery and monarchy. As I mentioned the king’s power over the monastery, merit-making practices by the royal monarchy reveal monarchical power and social hierarchy in Thai society. Simultaneously, the issue of ‘sponsoring’ underlying the association reinforces social bonds which remain crucially important in a political context (Van Esterik 1996: 35). For example, *kathin* ceremony (offering robes at end of Lenten season; กฐิน) is categorised into two forms: ‘royal’ (*luang*; หลวง) and ‘commoner’ (*rat*; ราษฎร์) according to the status of the monastery concerned (Bunnag 1973: 114). The Buddhist ceremony reflects an effective ‘language of images’ (Mitchell 1980). Whereas only kings and their representatives have been acknowledged to organise *kathin* at sixteen prestigious first class royal temples, the government would choose to be the sponsor in more than 167 remaining royal temples (Wichien 1979). However, when lay practitioners, especially elites and merchants, attempt to partake in similar form of merit making, they posit themselves as sponsors (*chao phap*; เจ้าภาพ) of the *kathin* ceremony in the public monastery (Bunnag 1973: 115-116). The sponsorship of the *kathin* ceremony becomes a channel to negotiate institutional power and social-imaged values in the society. Gray defined the action as the character of ‘competing virtues’, suggesting that the Theravada idiom of purification leaves ample room for a new ‘legitimacy’ of religious practice and generates new power elites for supporting the national religious institution (Gray 1991: 60).

Thirdly, merit-making practices show the relationship between local Buddhist entities and established Buddhism. The Buddhist and ritual practices of indigenous people and group are integral part of established Buddhism. Rituals as ‘events with social function’, noted by Turner (1969), are necessary to be carefully examined in order to fully understand the relationship between Buddhism and Thais. According to Tambiah (1970: 1), ‘a Thai village is not an island by itself; it is part of a wider network of social relationships and it is embedded in a civilization’. He argues that Thai Buddhism is ‘a synchronic, ordered scheme of collected representation’ (Tambiah 1970: 2). Buddhist systems in contemporary Thailand consist of the grand Buddhist literary, historical

tradition, and local rituals. For example, mortuary rites performed by Buddhist monks, and therefore labeled ‘Buddhist’, address the connection between the Buddhist rite along with the institution of monkhood and the associated major religious concepts (Tambiah 1970: 2). The complex structural account of contemporary Buddhism consequently illustrates the structural relations of hierarchy, opposition, complementary and linkage between Buddhism and the spirit cults arranged in one single field (Tambiah 1970: 377).

Another example is Cohen (2001) studied Yuan Buddhism, a particular variant of Theravada Buddhism prevalent among the Tai<sup>73</sup> speaking people. The study concentrated on the long history of the four examples of the ‘holy man’ who were recognised as the modern *ton bun* (a source of merit; ตันบุญ) tradition in northern Thailand. The study also examined the religious beliefs and practices of Kruba Siwichai<sup>74</sup>, portraying the phenomenon of Buddhist millennialism as a form of Buddhist revivalism. Cohen argued that revivalism took the form of opposition to a modern state perceived as unjust and immoral, and that it envisioned an ideal Buddhist realm transcending the sovereignty of the nation state and proclaiming the supremacy of Buddhist morality. He further discussed the sacral kinship dimension of *ton bun*. Cohen (2017) continued his study of charismatic monks by comparing the lineage of forest monks in the Lanna<sup>75</sup> and Isan<sup>76</sup> regions. He argued that the modern holy man in Lanna is a form of ‘Buddhist revivalism and active utopianism’, in contrast to the eremitical, world-renouncing and *arahant* (‘mystical’; อรหันต์) tradition of Ajarn Man<sup>77</sup> in Isan region (Cohen 2017: 59).

Apart from the three forms of relations mentioned above, I therefore believe that *wai phra kao wat seub siri sawat kao ratchakarn* (paying homage to the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of Chakri dynasty; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดสืบสิริสวัสดิ์สืบรัชกาล) embodies the relations between people and the three core institutions; nation, religion, monarchy via the state-sponsored practice. The objective of *wai phra kao wat seub siri sawat kao ratchakarn* is to stimulate Thais to show remembrance and gratitude for the nine monarchies of Chakri dynasty. Moreover, this campaign was held on the occasion of the celebration of the 234<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rattanakosin* City under Royal Benevolence

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<sup>73</sup>Tai (ไท) refers to an ethnic group in northern region of Thailand.

<sup>74</sup>‘Krubā’ (venerated father) is a calling position of Lanna forest monk in northern Thailand. Kruba Siwichai is a famous charismatic monk of Lanna Buddhism (Cohen 2017).

<sup>75</sup> Lanna refers to an ethnic group in northern region of Thailand.

<sup>76</sup>Isan refers to northeastern region in Thailand.

<sup>77</sup>Ajarn Man (the revered father named Man) is a popular forest monk in northeastern region. His lineage is in the forest meditative tradition and possesses charismatic power (Taylor 1993).



(20 – 24 April 2016). Related to the evidence, symbolic characters of the individual institutions were interwoven with the invented theme and destinations. Arguably, state exploits *wai phra kao wat* in an attempt to legitimate the relations between the societal domains of state, people, and monarchy on the basis of Buddhism. *Wai phra kao wat* then contributes to shaping the identity of contemporary Thailand in accordance with the recent state's demand.

### Merit transference

Another disposition of merit making that is worth discussing is merit transference because this notion appears in shaping new forms of merit making activities in order to attract *wai phra kao wat* participants. In brief, scholars criticise the feasibility of transferring merit from two perspectives. Firstly, is it acceptable within the Buddhist canon to transfer merit to the deceased and other people? Secondly, is it possible to transact merit for a better life not only in this world but also the otherworld? Although there is no guarantee of results, merit transference from the social perspective provides 'an important reciprocity mechanism in Buddhist religious action' (Tambiah 1977: 290). Wijeyewardene (1986: 49) identifies the inherent contradiction between the pursuit of individual merit and the denial of the reality of the individual. He notes that 'the transference of merit is a particularly suitable reconciliation of this contradiction' (Wijeyewardene 1986: 49). The religious actions symbolically utilise transmission and communication, not only between laymen and monks but also human and invisible entities in order to achieve individual goals. For example, when lay people perform meritorious actions like *tak bath* (alms giving; ตักบาตร) or *kruad nam* (pouring water to the deceased and spirits; กรวดน้ำ), they may receive nothing more than a chant. Yet, as it is believed that merit can be transferred from the living to the dead, or even to the deities and spirits, meritorious actions become visible instruments to negotiate with the invisible power of merit. Merit transference also implies the acceptance of the existence of deities in lay Buddhism. Obeyesekere (1968: 26) argues that merit transference sheds light on the presumed relationship between man and his deity in a complex structure of 'mutual self-interest'. That is, merit-makers transfer merit in order to achieve mundane objectives, whereas deities assist merit-makers because of the anticipated reward of salvation (Obeyesekere 1968: 26). Finally, merit transference is effective for maintaining kinship

solidarity, and they are illustrated through examples such as the acquisition of merit from a son through his ordination (Gombrich 1971: 219). Transferring merit by ordination suggests a Buddhist role regarding the method to strengthen specific social bonds in the kinship system. Consequently, merit transference is a way to ensure that people strive to do what is called *kwam dee* ('goodness'; ความดี) by associating with karmic doctrine. Meritorious virtue does not just accumulate personal rewards but motivates wider society to acknowledge the moral criterion of being good from a Buddhist perspective. In case of *wai phra kao wat*, a range of merit transferring activities illustrates the intimate relation not only between Thais and their kinship system that is already mentioned but also between Thais and the monarchy. Thai people can transfer merit to the kings by performing *wai phra kao wat* in the nine royal temples organised by the state. The degree of symbolic significance implies that Thai state strives to solve conflicts by adhering to the concept of Thai nationalism. I argue that *wai phra kao wat* promoted by the state provides the sanctification of the core institutions that plays a crucial role in reviving credibility of the non-democratised elected government. I will further analyse this issue in chapter 5.

According to the studies of Buddhist roles in contemporary Thai society, it can be concluded that popular Buddhism determines the ultimate power of spiritual potency in dynamic social changes. Meritorious practice is still purposeful as long as Thai people continue to acknowledge the power of *boon* and *bap* in karmic doctrine. Popular Buddhism rationalised by *boon* and *bap* also plays an influential role in formulating moral principles in Thai state organisation. Simultaneously, Buddhist practices and religiosity support the emergence of socio-cultural changes in contemporary Thai society. They also reflect the relocalisation of the spirit cults and local rites from the margin to the centre of national religious practices (Jackson 2016: 826).

Traditionally, making merit (*thamboon*, ทำบุญ) or donating (*borijak*, บริจาค) money and materials is acknowledged as a meritorious endeavour the dead, or they may enjoy the merit themselves. According to the Buddhist canon is section of worshipping criterions (Harvey 2013: 240), offering necessary objects to monks and temples is recognised as '*amisa bucha*<sup>78</sup>,' (อามิสบูชา). In *wai phra kao wat*, however, merit acquisition

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<sup>78</sup> According to the discourse of Buddha recorded in *Anguttara Nikaya* (Incremental collection), the *Sutta-pitika* (Collection of discourses in the scriptural canon of Buddhism), the Buddha said, 'all Bhikkhu, there were two forms of *bucha* (worshipping); one is *amisa bucha* (worshipping by

has been presented as possible through various activities. The invention of meritorious activities is connected to rituals, local cultures and daily activities. This process aims to rationalise and concretise the idea of merit, the original background of these practices. The synchronisation of traditional and contemporary knowledge is a remarkable technique employed in *wai phra kao wat* to commoditise meritorious practices in the new market system.

### *Wai phra kao wat*: The religious innovation of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thailand

The key concept of *wai phra kao wat* is that all nine temples should be visited in one day. Although this practice guideline seems to be flexible and easy to follow, the timing restrictions and ‘invented’ ideologies makes the practice more challenging for participants including pilgrims/tourists, monks, and organisers. As I observed, the temples in Bangkok usually open from 8 am to 5 pm. In order to complete all nine destinations, participants rarely spend more than one hour at each temple site. Responding to this brevity, the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture suggest each temple in Bangkok set a one- and two-hour visiting route for *wai phra kao wat* participants with each temple selecting points of interests from the individual sacred historical landmarks. Some temples set their own destinations and directories in a notice board located near the main entrance (Figure 3.32).

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necessary things like flowers, candles, and incense sticks) and the other is *Dhamma bucha* (worshipping by practicing Dhamma)...*Dhamma bucha* is the best’.





Figure 3.32: A signboard indicating the temple's directory (on the top) and two recommended visiting routes: one and two hours respectively (below) at the main entrance of *Suthat Thepwaram* temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

The loose structure of *wai phra kao wat* is useful for the commodifying processes in popular Buddhism as the organisers, both public and private, can adjust and apply ‘new’ features into the practice’s structure. The Ministry of Culture held a campaign promotion of pilgrimage called ‘*senthang boon*’ (merit route; เส้นทางบุญ) by employing the formation of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok to promote activities in rural provinces such as *wai phra kao wat* in Chiangmai, Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, and a similar programme to visit *wai* 9 spiritual deities in 9 Chinese shrines in Bangkok (The Ministry of Culture 2015: 37). As such, the recognition of *wai phra kao wat* has affected the commercial opportunities of those living around the temple sites. Mr. Chatchai Thongsawat, the leader of *Pok Arun*, a temple-centred community (ชุมชนวัด; *choomchon wat*) in the area of Arun Ratchawararam Temple, explained that ‘due to the popularity of *wai phra kao wat*, many locals around *wat Arun* have renovated the ground floor of their homes to be coffee shops, restaurants, and groceries stores. This allows older residents to work and generate their

own income after retirement'<sup>79</sup>. Moreover, the committee of Arun Ratchawararam temple decided to open a walking street called '*thanon wattanatham wang derm*' (a cultural street at the old Palace<sup>80</sup>; ถนนวัฒนธรรมวังเดิม) on weekends (figure 3.33). They allowed sellers from anywhere to open booths selling products. The activity was successful in the beginning but during the last 3-4 months, consumer numbers decreased, possibly relating to the economic situation of the country. The committees therefore suspended this project and are waiting for a good time to promote it again. Similarly, the temple allocates a shopping area for participants to buy souvenirs, food, and drinks in the temple (figure 3.34). Most sellers here are outsiders who purchased the right to trade from local sellers who no longer wish to do business here. Consequently, *wai phra kao wat* plays a part in motivating the local economy that is explicitly illustrated in many temple communities.



Figure 3.33: '*Thanon wattanatham wang derm*' at Arun Ratchawararam temple  
(source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

<sup>79</sup> Interviewed on 27 June 2016.

<sup>80</sup> '*Wang derm*' (old palace; วังเดิม) is the old calling name of the current area of Arun Ratchawararam temple because previously there was an old palace grounded in this area.



Figure 3.34: Souvenir shops at Arun Ratchawararam temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

The Thai government also promotes a project entitled ‘*talard pracharat*’ (ตลาดประชารัฐ, the state-people market) to allocate trading plots for rural Thai people to promote and sell their local products, providing an opportunity for a rural market to open in the city (Figure 3.35). *Pracharat* market was promoted in Chetuphon wimonmangkalaram temple. It was held during 18 – 19 July 2016 which was parallel to the official promotion of *wai phra kao wat* organised by the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture. At that time <sup>81</sup>, the organiser designated Chetuphon wimonmangkalaram temple as one of the route destinations. Consequently, it could be said that from this situation that the state predetermines the locations of *wai phra kao wat* according to maximum commercial advantages. The continuing popularity of the practice was employed to follow the state policy. Similarly, perhaps unavoidably, it appears that religious elements are implicated into an overwhelming process of commodification. The temple destination became a new market, whereas *wai phra kao wat* participants became consumers.

Reimagining the traditional practice of ‘*wai phra*’ (paying homage to the Buddha; ไหว้พระ) as ‘*wai phra kao wat*’ (paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples; ไหว้พระเก้าวัด) increases the ‘challenging force’ to the participants. Most of Thai Buddhists are

<sup>81</sup> 18 – 19 July 2016, Asalahabucha day and the first day of Lent period respectively, both are important Buddhist holidays.

familiar with merit-making activities and worshipping the Buddha at temples. In the case of *wai phra kao wat*, adding the number nine provides a heightened experience to the customary religious practice. It compels participants to challenge themselves both physically and mentally (most of them simply said, ‘mission complete’ when they finished all nine destinations within the restricted period). A young boy I interviewed <sup>82</sup> said that he wanted to break a record for the shortest time for *wai phra kao wat*. By doing this, he made himself extra conditions to complete the practice. For example, although he planned the nine temples destinations before travelling, he decided to travel by public transport without a map. When he arrived at each temple, he took photos of himself with each temple’s sign at the main entrance, paid homage to the Buddha, and donated money in every temple. He completed *wai phra kao wat* in 3.5 hours and said that all the conditions made it more challenging and joyful even though he made no material gains. Consequently, adding the extra number together with the variety of destinations is an effective strategy to increase market value of the common practice. Also, it explicitly transforms the customary practice into a challenging mass tourism experience.

### *Domestic Tourism*

In 2014, the Ministry of Culture announced its new position as a ‘socioeconomic’ ministry that aims to invest and develop Thai culture as a form of economic capital. Some scholars (Anson 1999; Baum and Butler 1999; Pratt and Anyu 2016:82) note that ‘destinations may be even able to leverage the historical significance of Buddhist institution by developing cultural heritage tourist attractions. Temples, in particular, are seen as ‘potential social capital’ (*toon thang sangkhom theemee sakkayapab*, ทุนทางสังคมที่มีศักยภาพ) for their ability to attract both pilgrims and tourists, with both able to gain spiritual strength and relieve mental difficulties by donating money or offering alms to the monks (Ministry of Culture 2014: 5). Spending money for the next life seems to be a recurring feature of religious tourism. When temples and surrounding communities mutually benefit from religious tourism, *wai phra kao wat* is being sponsored and promoted in extending routes around the country.

When the structure of *wai phra kao wat* closely resembles cultural heritage tourism, it contributes to shaping both the creative economy and modern socio-cultural

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<sup>82</sup> Interviewed on 7 June 2016.

lifestyles. Elliott (1983: 380) argues cultural assets are conducive to tourism industry. Temples and Buddhism are national symbols of Thailand. During *wai phra kao wat*, both national symbols are implicitly converted into a commoditised landscape. Temples provide the spatial movement by transforming sacred sphere into a tourist attraction. The popularity of the practice increases the popularity of the nine- temple-destinations, which in turn, increases the enjoyment derived from visiting and experiencing the temple. Once there, participants both domestic and international spend money on facilities and services in and around the temples. Another example is, the construed auspiciousness of each temple is derived, in part, from the historical foundation of individual temples; their ‘trademark’ (see details in chapter 4). The distinctive landscapes and sacred myths relating to each temple induce the human interest and affects participants’ recognition and perception. Similarly, this process provides a value-adding culture that motivates the growing number of both laities and tourists to visit sites.

*Wai phra kao wat* nowadays has been reproduced from its Bangkok origins to regional areas such as Nakhorn Pathom, Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai provinces. Public authorities like TAT and the Ministry of Culture also promote and sponsor new destinations of the nine temples known as ‘tourism on merit route’ (*‘karn tong thieaw sen thang boon;’* การท่องเที่ยวเส้นทางบุญ) in rural provinces such as Chiang mai<sup>83</sup>, Mae Hong Sorn<sup>84</sup>, Cha Cheong Sao<sup>85</sup> (Religious Affairs Department, the Ministry of Culture 2015). The promotion of *wai phra kao wat* in these rural areas are often combined with state-oriented campaigns promoting traditional village crafts or local annual ‘fairs’ or *thetsakan* (เทศกาล) into promoting as well as creating the identity of *wai phra kao wat* in specific areas.

### *Film industry*

The Thai film industry is considered an important source of the national creative economy. The country has strong potential for international film distribution and investors<sup>86</sup>. It is a hub of the entertainment and media industry in South East Asia,

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<sup>83</sup> Chiang mai is a province in Northern part of Thailand.

<sup>84</sup> Mae Hong Sorn is a province in Northern part of Thailand.

<sup>85</sup> Cha Cheong Sao is a province in Eastern part of Thailand.

<sup>86</sup><http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/business/corporate/30303938> (Accessed online: 12 January 2017), “Thai film industry still attractive despite 2016 slump, producer says”.



generating approximately 1.51 billion baht<sup>87</sup> in 2016. Its growth has sustained through the decades and been sustained from both domestic and international consumers. Thailand's horror and action films particularly proved to be of significant interest in the international market<sup>88</sup>. Film is also considered as a way to defend and communicate the conceptual ideas and lifestyles of both central and local people in different regions. Based on the modern trend of Thai films, Buddhism is often portrayed from a perspective of faith and mystery that Pattana (2006:264) argues Buddhism as an everyday living religion is mostly against canonical interpretations. In the case of *wai phra kao wat*, *wai phra kao wat* has become a plot basis of the film named *9 wat* (nine temples, *kao wat*, เก้าวัด) (The synopsis of this film is provided in chapter 2). A controversial aspect of the film *9 wat* is based on the competing interpretation of the practice in the modern Thai context. The film reflects the 'extraordinary' sacred interpretation of *wai phra kao wat*. The sacred interpretation of the practice offers engaged vision to evaluate the current situations of popular Buddhism and morality of Buddhists in contemporary Thailand. So, I will further discuss about this topic in part of '*wai phra kao wat*: a "new" identity of modern Thais'. Approaching from the business viewpoint, the film *9 wat* was successful as it was distributed in the American film market in 2010. The film was renamed as '*Secret Sunday*'.

Popular Buddhism in Thailand, especially symbolically and materially manifested in religious commodities has converged into the market economy (Pattana 2006: 121) and it is branded by commentators upholding a strict doctrinal or ascetic Buddhism as a Buddhist crisis or *phuttaphanit*. Nevertheless, the convergence between Buddhism and the new market causes many people to consider not only economic profitability but also some of the basic principles of Buddhism in a more easily understandable format. Capitalism and tourism industry catalyse the emergence of invented religious practices to serve the market in contemporary Thailand. When finance underpins religions, those religions must adapt to modes of practices that are able to effectively function within the new social context. Nevertheless, collective rituals, traditions and festivals remain important in contemporary Thai society, quite apart from the practice of *wai phra kao*

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<sup>87</sup> It is approximate £ 3,138,700.

<sup>88</sup><https://www.thaitrade.com/press-releases/detail/Thailand-%80%99s-film-industry-leads-the-way-for-south-east-asia-at-american-film-market-and-conference-2016-339> (Accessed online 29 November 2016), "Thailand's film industry leads the way for South-East Asia at American film market & conference 2016."

*wat*. As an aspect of market culture, when popular Buddhism has expanded the growth of religious commodities to predominantly serve worldly issues, the invention of religious practices has been based on the notions of merit and kamma because they are the most easily accessible aspects of Buddhist practices.

In case of *wai phra kao wat*, the innovation of this Buddhist practice reflects the dual characters of popular Buddhism which ensure the sustainability of Buddhism in the contemporary era. First, the hybrid elements incorporated in Buddhism such as the syncretism of folk beliefs, local customs, sacred figures, and even non-traditional elements related to the practice can be exploited to support the dynamic changes within the contemporary context. Due to their exotic and sacred qualities, such the hybrid elements complement orthodox Buddhism and the tourism industry. Additionally, the variety of cultural tactics and folk beliefs embedded into the practice provides the enchantment of popular Buddhism that convinces both religious and non-religious persons to investigate the values and have shared experiences. The convergence and divergence from both traditional Buddhism and cultural combination creates an ‘updated’ version of Buddhist practices that increasingly create economic value from the creativity of Thailand’s consuming religion. *Wai phra kao wat* also represents the intangible manifestation of Buddhist ideologies including meritorious virtue, kammic result, and merit transference by visualising such ideals into the temple-based meritorious activities. The Buddhist ideologies concerning merit and karma are predominantly based on widespread meritorious activities. When meritorious activities are mainly held in the monasteries’ spheres, they unavoidably reinforce the shifting role of the monasteries from the sacred sphere to the religious market. The dual characters are widely perceived as the main components of the religious innovations of popular Buddhism among the contemporary Thai society.

## CHAPTER 4

### At least we are sabai-jai<sup>89</sup>

#### Introduction

‘I may not even get anything obvious from wai phra kao wat.

Yet, at least, I am sabai jai now’.

(Interview Khun Udom, a 49-year-old man, at Saked Woramahavihara temple)

‘*Sabai jai*’ (‘*sabai*’ means comfortable and relaxed and ‘*jai*’ means heart) is the most common response I received when asking why informants why they choose to participate in the *wai phra kao wat* practice. This answer makes me consider *wai phra kao wat* as a rhetorical practice of contemporary Thai society. The practice is imbued with a sense of contentment for participants. Two questions immediately come to mind when considering the practice from this perspective; ‘how do participants gain *kwam sabai jai*<sup>90</sup> from *wai phra kao wat*?’ and ‘what elements of *wai phra kao wat* account for the feeling of *kwam sabai jai*?’ *Kwam sabai jai* (ความสบายใจ) is a common Thai expression that relates to feeling of happiness or emotional comfort. *Kwam sabai jai*, I argue, is the most convincing and powerful concept that determines the actions and deeds, both positive and negative, of individual Thais. The construed meaning of *kwam sabai jai* in the case of *wai phra kao wat*, I argue, becomes a rhetorical instrument for both Thai people and the Thai state. The former, symbolically and rhetorically, employs *kwam sabai jai* to sustain individuality and personal satisfactions whereas the latter employs *kwam sabai jai* to bolster the credibility of the state and contribute to its objective of national unity. Service (1975) argues that a mere force cannot sustain the stability of the state. The modern state must also regulate people by ‘means of thought control’. It may be from ‘the sanctification of existence via theology’ or the manipulation of production and direction of secular thought by bureaucratic means (Thu 1992). To exemplify this, lay pilgrim-tourists approach *wai phra kao wat* as a contemporary practice of mass religious

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<sup>89</sup> “At least we are *sabai jai*” means in Thai language, “*yang noi puak rao kor sabai jai*” (อย่างน้อยพวกเราสบายใจ).

<sup>90</sup> ‘*kwam-*’ is a prefix which constitutes a noun form. So, ‘*kwam sabai jai*’ means a feeling of comfort and relaxation.



tourism. They enjoy travelling together while gaining merit at ‘sacred’ sites. The ‘sacred’ implication of this practice, I argue, leads to *kwam sabai jai* for participants, despite the disputable and at times controversial claims to the sacredness of the sites. The Thai state, for their part, approves *wai phra kao wat* as a ‘good’ modern practice that can support ‘good’ Thai governance and citizenship.

As *wai phra kao wat* is a state-sponsored campaign, it is interesting to investigate how this practice is legitimated through its perceived support of the cultural policies of the state, including the current regimes ‘twelve core values’ (ค่านิยม 12 ประการ) and their much publicized (and derided) official campaign of ‘returning *kwam suk* to Thai people’ (returning happiness to Thai people; *khuen kwam suk hai kab prachachon*; คืนความสุขให้กับประชาชนไทย). Finally, the statement ‘at least, we are *sabai jai*’ will profoundly reflect the rhetorical power in the practice that not only describes the perception of *kwam sabai jai* from the popular Buddhist practice but also reflects how the Thai state facilitates the rhetorical popularity of *kwam sabai jai* to contribute to the sustainability of their regime. The ‘we’ in the statement, then, refers to both Thai citizens (as individuals and as a collective) and the state as the recipients of *kwam sabai jai* from this practice. Again, *kwam sabai jai* is not merely a ready-made ‘cause and effect’ explanation for moral practices but functions as an implicitly soft rhetoric, a seemingly uncontroversial force that promises to consolidate nation, monarchy and religion during a period of political instability in Thailand.

The following section is organised into three main sections. Firstly, I introduce the relationships between rhetoric and culture, emphasising ritual and religious aspects to demonstrate the interactive roles and symbolic significance of rhetoric from an anthropological perspective. I will then concentrate on the symbolic and rhetorical elements of *wai phra kao wat* that contribute to feelings of *kwam sabai jai* by illustrating interviews and observing information of informants. Finally, I will study how the Thai state employs the popularity of *wai phra kao wat* to support cultural policies and to generate uncontroversial power in contemporary Thai society.

## 1) The relationships between rhetoric and culture

### *Rhetoric and cultural interpretation*

Rhetoric analysis is a postmodern instrument to analyse the emergence of cultural diversity. As humans produce culture, human agents impart their attitudes, desires, and opinions to cultural construction. Rhetoric is simultaneously fluid in this process as it is a decisive factor contributing to cultural diversity. Rhetoric then provides an interactive force that motivates individuals to any numbers of ends (Carrithers 2005: 577). According to Strecker and Tyler (2009: 4) ‘rhetoric is founded in culture and culture is founded in rhetoric’. There is no ‘zero-degree rhetoric’ in any cultural patterns (Strecker and Tyler 2009: 1). The study of culture from a rhetorical perspective postulates the interpretation of cultural meanings towards practices, actions, and performances in the cultural system. Additionally, seeing that culture is rich with symbols (Geertz 1973: 4 – 7), rhetoric conveys symbolic meanings in cultural diversity. On the one hand, rhetoric manifests symbolic culture that specifies the internal relations of different features within a culture. On the other hand, it suggests the external relations of different cultures within the social system.

Rhetoric is employed to convey the way we persuade ourselves, or self-talk, to affect deeds, opinions, and beliefs, either consciously or unconsciously. Nienkamp (2009: 18), coined the term ‘internal rhetoric’ to draw attention to the rhetorical nature in human thought. The ‘internal rhetoric’ is regarded as a deliberate ‘terministic screen’ (Nienkamp 2009: 18). Burke (1966: 45) defined ‘terministic screen’ and argued, ‘...even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must also be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality’. Reality is, according to Burke, a rhetorical fabrication. It allows describing and interpreting reality in order to serve individual satisfaction and socio-cultural demands. The internal rhetoric provides the understanding of ‘self’ constitution. Nienkamp (2009: 19) argued the ‘self’ is primarily created from the influential power of internal rhetoric embedded in language and culture without awareness. The influential power of internal rhetoric cultivates the inner voice of individuals in psyches and connects to the transformation of cultural meanings in wider society. Associated with *wai phra kao wat*, *kwam sabai jai* is an example of ‘internal rhetoric’ as suggested by Nienkamp (2009). That is to say, although the acquisition of *kwam sabai jai* from participating in *wai phra*

*kao wat* is a personal and inner experience it allows people to match values of practice according to particular desired ends. For example, the variation of *wai phra kao wat* routes and themes are mostly designated from social trends and particular occasions such as ‘*wai phra kao wat kae pee chong*’, (‘paying homage to the nine temples for a bad year in the cycle of Chinese belief’; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดแก้ปีชง) and ‘*wai phra kao san chao jean in Chinese New Year Festival*’ (ไหว้พระเก้าศาลเจ้าจีนช่วงเทศกาลตรุษจีน, paying homage to the Chinese deities in the nine shrines during Chinese New Year Festival). The former thematic practice is based on the belief that when the upcoming age of any people drops into a bad year in the cycle of Chinese Year, they have a higher risk of encountering misfortune. To protect against these anticipated difficulties, as a result, Thais participating in *wai phra kao wat* as a spiritual solution to bad effects of a bad Chinese year. By doing this, Chinese temples like *Mangkorn Kamalawat Temple* <sup>91</sup> (วัดมังกรกมลาวาส) and Chinese shrines are designated as main destinations. These temples hold a special activity called ‘*pad tua*’ (ปัดตัว) <sup>92</sup> which wards off bad spirits. The rhetorical verbal expression of *kwam sabai jai* in the public sphere also significantly cultivates a modern trend of religious practice in contemporary Thai society.

### *Rhetoric and persuasive power*

*Kwam sabai jai* signifies the persuasive power of rhetoric that contributes not only to individual satisfaction but also social meanings of ‘appropriateness’ or ‘goodness’. Persuasiveness, an essential force of rhetoric, relies on cultures, beliefs and customs to constitute their meanings and significance. The persuasive power appeals to both individuals and wider society with the quality of persuasion the most distinctive power to cultivate credibility. Rumsey (2009: 126) argued rhetoric provides the persuasive power demonstrated in communicative genres. The persuasive effect constructs social criterion as well as the ethical standards to govern people. While rhetoric has the potential to

<sup>91</sup> *Mangkorn kamalawat* temple is also known as *Leng Nei Yi* temple (วัดเล่งเน่ยยี่) which is located on Yaowaraj road (ถนนเยาวราช).

<sup>92</sup> To do “*pad tua*” (ปัดตัว), the temple provide red paper cost 100 baht (approximately £2.17). Participants write their personal profiles including name, age, address, time and place of birth in the red paper. After that, they light 3 incense sticks to bless in front of the Chinese deities named “*Tai Sua Ear*” (ไท่ส่วยเอี๊ยะ) and then wave the red paper 13 times over the body from head to toe. Finally, you put the red paper in arranging boxes. The temple will organise the annual ceremony to pray for all prayers and burn all red paper at the end of the year.

compromise and negotiate authority leading to consistently increased recognition to all social groups, it may be utilised to conserve and consolidate existing power structures. The relationship between listener and speaker is constantly negotiated in the endeavor to conserve power and identity. At the national level, the unity and solidarity of the nation is officially constructed by rhetorical orientation. A government will attempt to reify language in public speeches and policies to acquire the loyalty of ordinary citizens (Herzfeld 1997). He exemplifies the idea from the statement of Hasting Banda, former president of Malawi, who announced, ‘I had been selflessly dedicated... to the good cause of Mother Malawi’ (*Boston Globe*, 6 January 1996: 7). The statement aims to mitigate the crisis of human rights abuses during the president’s tenure of office (Herzfeld 1997: 4). According to the study, the prominence of *wai phra kao wat*, I argue, partially emerges from auspicious meaning making produced by rhetorical devices. The persuasive effects of *wai phra kao wat* contribute to religious practice as mass tourism. The practice is (re-)interpreted to support ‘inventing’ purposes for both individuals and groups.

### *Rhetoric and vicissitudes of life*

Apart from its persuasive power, rhetoric is regarded as an art of living. It appears to be a narrative technique to express emotions and reactions towards inconclusive evidence, especially in times of crisis, turmoil and vicissitude of life. For example, according to Wiseman (2009: 85) rhetoric can construe persuasive meaning and provide a narrative of spiritual disease that it may then alleviate. These two functioning roles of rhetoric are distinctively employed to resolve what Carrithers (2009) refers to as the ‘vicissitudes of life’, unexpected situations and social crises. Herzfeld (1997: 4) argued that ordinary people tend to search for spiritual strength in the midst of exceptional turmoil or crisis.

Basso (2009: 121) argues ‘habitus’ plays a part in shaping ‘the complicated interpersonal realm of activity’. Culture, she argues, is mostly taught and learned from generation to generation, with a distinctive actor-oriented character. It also engages in rhetorical and linguistic operations. Rhetoric culture produces the alternative to express emotional reality through the communicating process. *Wai phra kao wat* is interwoven with culture and rhetoric in shaping various meanings and social purposes. According to the ethnographic evidence, one of the most popular interpretations is perceived as a ‘modern’ solution for ‘vicissitudes’ of Thai life that I will further discuss within this

chapter. The rhetoric embedded into the practice of *wai phra kao wat* manifests the making of fascination with its spiritual activity in contemporary Thai society.

### *Rhetoric and ritual economy*

Another rhetorical dimension of culture is involved with ritual economy. As the emergence of the practice drawing on complex elements of traditional Thai culture, *wai phra kao wat* has become a source of economic and political power associating with the social management of meaning and interpretation. It has been commoditised and consumed as a cultural product by both people and the state. Ritual economy consequently is raised to explore the important social roles and potency of *wai phra kao wat* in shading meaning and contouring the interpretation of practicing experiences in contemporary context.

McAnany and Wells (2008: 3) define ritual economy, as ‘the process of provision and consuming that materializes and substantiates worldview for managing meaning and shaping interpretation’. It understands power, economy and human agency as interlinked with society and social change. Thus, ritual and economy are linked but are not reducible to one another. Similarly, the social implications of ritual economy go far beyond the dichotomy of economics and ritual. ‘Ritual economy is situated within the realm of an agent-focused social practice’ (McAnany and Wells 2008: 3). Ritual economy emphasises ‘the dynamic and ongoing process of materialisation in both social and economic terms, whereby all members of society can participate in negotiating, endorsing, reproducing, contesting, and transforming cultural meaning...’ (Halperin 2008: 250; see also Dirks 1992; Douglas & Isherwood 1979; Geertz 1973; Turner 1969). In the study of *wai phra kao wat*, the practice has been organised and shaped in forms and purposes to bolster agents power. Again, the idea of ritual economy is not novel. McAnany and Wells (2009: 10) note, ‘ritual economy shows that both canonical and economical laws are not out of reach of human hands’. In the following section, I will study the constituents of *wai phra kao wat* from the rhetorical approach to explore the organisation of meaning making and interpretation in relation to the dual agents of the people and the state. Additionally, I will rhetorically analyse the causality of *kwam sabai jai* in relation to *wai phra kao wat*.

## 2) The interpretative process of *kwam sabai jai* from rhetorical perspective: a case of *wai phra kao wat*

I have argued that *kwam sabai jai* is a key contributor to the successful emergence of *wai phra kao wat* as a social phenomenon in contemporary Thai society. In this section, I will explore the interpretative process of *kwam sabai jai* from the perspective of individual and collective Thai citizens and the Thai state to address the structural causality and the verbal transformation of the socio-cultural practice. In doing this, the analysis of narrative experiences and interview transcripts acquired during fieldwork will focus on rhetorical framework and narrative ideology. The acquisition of *kwam sabai jai* from the dual perspectives of both the Thai people and Thai state, I argue, serves different purposes. Rhetorically, Thai citizens approach the practice as an encounter with the ‘sacred’. The supernatural elements of the practice, enhanced by the rhetoric of religious symbols, state-endorsed narratives, and individual experiences, allow people to rationalise the sacredness of the *wai phra kao wat* practice. The rationalisation of these magical aspects of ritual should not be underestimated. Likewise, the motivation of individual participants to acquire supposed material benefits to should not be overestimated. Bourdieu (2000: 18) argues that ‘the failure to “historicize economic dispositions”, that is, to ignore that the so-called “rational” economic agent is the product of quite particular historical conditions’ runs the risk of reducing human behaviour to universal selfishness (McAnany and Wells 2009: 10). It would be a mistake, therefore, to simply conflate the motivation of individuals to engage with *wai phra kao wat* with the desire to acquire greater material resources. Participation must be viewed within the quite particular socio-political context of contemporary Thailand, in which engagement with a pseudo-religious activity, with a clear commercial aspect, has been rationalised to provide spiritual and psychological relief (*‘kwam sabai jai’*) to the people and the nation at a time of widespread ideological confusion and distrust of the political process.

The state, meanwhile, rhetorically frames the ritual as a ‘moral practice’ and bolsters it to guarantee moral virtues and implicit power in the governing system. Regarding state sponsorship, *wai phra kao wat* is considered as a ‘new’ instrument in an attempt to bring social cohesion amidst recent conflict. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* will show how Thai people and Thai governors draw on the semi-religious practice to work out how to communicate with one another and to manage social relations in meaningful ways.

### 2.1 The interpretation of *kwam sabai jai* from Thai people's views

According to Thai people's perspective, *wai phra kao wat*, as an invented religious activity, is mainly considered as a mental solution for an uncertain future. Sacred powers embedded in religious symbols and auspicious language are transmitted into actions that are led by astrologers and magic monks who are believed to communicate with invisible powers and negotiate for better future. These public figures play an influential role in creating social trends and become part of the repertoire of local cultural practice, or the 'habitus', the structure of dispositions. McAnany and Wells (2009: 8) argue, 'habitus is learned through family and community experiences of class structure, and through individuals' experiences of everyday life'. Associated with *wai phra kao wat*, the practice provides dynamic habitus in modern Thai society. As I argue astrologers and magic monks reify the sacred power of the practice and promote it as a meritorious activity, *wai phra kao wat* then arguably blurs the line of class experiences in order to serve all walks of life. The practice is therefore employed to support the state objective of projecting the Thai population as a single, unified entity. The claims of these men are rendered comprehensible to the Thai public by the inclusion of familiar symbols with an established cultural provenance.

#### Number nine

The magical significance of the individual numbers remains conspicuous in the wide range of sociocultural and supernatural thematic practices overlapping associations (Jackson 2016: 849). The number nine is imbued with holy or sacred meaning across several overlapping cultures. Brinton (1894: 168) notes that the origin of sacred numbers derives from an abstract operation of the intelligence and its main application in the imaginary and non-phenomenal world such as the trinities of Christianity and the trinities of Buddhism. Thus, nine is developed as a three-fold increase in a three primitive conception of the universe. The sacredness of number nine is rhetorically found in the nine worlds of Teutonic myth about the cosmic notion of the Aztecs (Brinton 1894: 170). The number nine is also found in Brahmin myths of the threefold heavens of Indra and in the *tridiva*, the human form described in Sanskrit as 'the nine mouthed' and 'the nine

door' from the belief that the nine forms of the soul enter and leave through nine openings (Brinton 1894: 170).

In Thailand, the numerical or other symbolic forms are predominantly associated with Thai religious beliefs as McDaniel (2011: 119) depicts the situation as a 'common logic at the very foundation of Thai Buddhism'. Brahmin myth is assumed to be the origin of the significance of the number nine in Thai culture as Thai cultures is intrinsically interwoven with Brahmin doctrine and myth. According to the Brahmin myth, the number nine embodied in the *tridiva*, threefold heaven, the habitat of *Indra*, a guardian deity in Buddhism (Brinton 1894: 170). Another relevant example to the Thai context is the sacredness of number nine in Chinese belief. Cohen (2001) suggests the Chinese celebrate the festival of the Nine Emperor Gods because number nine is recognised as a masculine number. When a double nine reaches its annual apogee, it marks the beginning of the rise of the feminine principle (Cohen 2001: 48). In Thailand, the Chinese Vegetarian Festival in southern Thailand adapts the number nine into determining the ritual cycle of the festival. Cohen (2008: 68) notes that the vegetarian festival in Kuan To shrine <sup>93</sup> is a complex nine-day event. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) acknowledges the form of this practice and promotes the annual festival in southern Thailand. Overall, there no clear, single origin for the sacredness of the number nine in Thai culture, however the amalgamation of these above influences may account for its prominence in Thai spiritual life.

In Thai folkloric belief nine is a 'lucky' number (*lek nam chok*, เลขนำโชค) due to its lexical quality. The pronunciation of number nine /kao/ (เก้า) is a near homophone to the word /kao/ (ก้าว), which means 'moving forward' or 'making progress'. The positive implication this numerical figure is ubiquitously employed in various kinds of rituals and spiritual practices in Thai popular culture. For example, when Thais begin new endeavours such as moving house or changing job, they often coincide the change to commence take place at an auspicious time, or *reuk yam* (ฤกษ์ยาม). The calculation of this good timing is requested from a monk or an astrologer who is believed to possess special communication skills. The number nine is very often applied to these 'good timings', such as 9.09 am. The application of number nine to signify 'reuk yam', I argue, is the most prominent reason for its rhetorical significance in the discourse of *wai phra kao wat*.

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<sup>93</sup> Kuan To shrine is located in the outskirts of Krabi provinces (Cohen 2008: 70).



The sacred interpretation of number nine is also evident in occult money (see details in chapter 4) and the allusion to King Rama IX. Economically, marking products with 9 is a ubiquitous, though odd, marketing strategies that takes advantage of human psychology to make the purchaser less inclined to bargain and more likely to part with her cash (Holdershaw et al. 1997). In Thailand, for example, the number nine is often the last digit of the fixed price for commercial products such as 99, 199 and 1999 bath. The technique is also applied to increase occult power in religious practices such as the fixed price for sacred objects or amulets, the fixed price of the offering things and the recommending amount of money to donate. Not only for commercial purposes, the fixed price ending with number nine is also mentioned as a sacred metaphor. The sacrality of number nine lies on the fundamental causality of most of the activities organised in the vicinities of *wai phra kao wat* routes. Khun Sombat, a 38-year-old informant <sup>94</sup> who has sold amulets in *Rakhang Ratchawararam* temples for 6 years, notes,

The belief in number nine as a lucky number plays an important role for my customers' demand. Once, I sold amulets in series "*Phra Somdet Wat Rakhang Roon Perd Kru*" (พระสมเด็จวัดระฆัง รุ่นเปิดกรุ) which cost 999 bath<sup>95</sup>. This series had been proposed the occult power that "if anyone possesses this series of amulets, you will ritually have "*kao na*" (ก้าวหน้า, progression or advancement) in your life and business". It was so popular that it sold out in a month.

The rhetorical power in 'sacred' metaphors and the number nine in Thai perception is pervasively recognised as popular commercialising strategy in sacred marketplaces as well as the political significance. The occult power of number nine has become a distinctive feature of material objects in socioeconomic and political practices in modern Thai society. The sacrality of number nine has been made explicit in the policies and actions of a succession of Thai civilian and military prime ministers. For example, in 2002, the Bangkok Post documented that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra assigned the national budget to be adjusted so that the number nine would be predominant in the figures,

Folk superstition, political marketing or genuine fiscal prudence? Cabinet ministers yesterday approved a token 100-million baht cut to the fiscal 2003

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<sup>94</sup> Interviewed on 15 March 2016.

<sup>95</sup> It is approximately £21.26.

budget, bringing total spending to an auspicious figure of 999.9 billion. The budget Bureau had originally proposed a budget of one trillion baht, but Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra called for spending under the PM's Office to be cut back to reach the "lucky nines" figures...

(Chatrudee and Suphaphan 2002).

This statement suggests that, following cuts of 100million baht from the preceding plan of the annual budget of 1 trillion or 1,000,000,000,000 baht <sup>96</sup>, the final national budget for the 2003 financial year came to 999,900,000,000 baht <sup>97</sup> – a total that included four lucky-nine figures. Another example is noted by Keyes (2006: 25 – 26). He depicted,

The political destiny of the leader of the September 2006 military coup against Thaksin, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, who is a Muslim, "Hinged heavily on the auspicious number nine... The coup took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month [September] in the Buddhist year 2549 [2006]. The day following the coup, General Sonthi appeared on TV at 9.39 a.m., "It was the number nine all the way"

(The Nation, 27 September 2006).

Paralleling this, the sacred implication of number nine also appeared in the political destiny of General Prayuth Chan Ocha, the current Prime Minister. Regarding the advice of his personal astrologer, the starting time of his first cabinet meeting after the May 2014 addressed 9.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 9 September 2014 (Lefevre 2014). That is, the ninth hour of the ninth day of the ninth month. The sacred interpretation of number nine as a 'lucky' figure has proved the influence of religious and superstitious significances grounded in all kinds of social activities in contemporary Thailand, not except for the direction of the political significance.

Another sacred interpretation of number nine is related to the monarchy. Symbolically, the number nine is coincident with the expression of King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, the ninth monarch of the Chakri dynasty. The supremacy of the king together with the auspicious implication of number nine is appealing for the sacred reverence of Thai people (Jackson 2016: 853). Consequently, the rhetorical and embedded social significance of the number nine is recognised as a 'new' feature of intangible cultural resources in popular Thai culture.

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<sup>96</sup> It is approximately £21,739,130,000.

<sup>97</sup> It is approximately £21,737,000,000.

The use of the number nine in *wai phra kao wat* practice, I argue, ritually charges commodifying values with a sacred aura of pseudo-religiosity. Apart from determining the goal for success in the promotional campaign, the symbolic characters of number nine in Thai perception as I previously mentioned are all drawn into the field of *wai phra kao wat*. First, the number nine is rhetorically and symbolically an integral part of meritorious activities. The organisers of meritorious activities applied the number nine as the last digit of donating money or the amount of the offerings such as worshipping through 19 baht donations, said to be beneficial for long-term wealth (บูชา 19 บาท รวย รวย รวย, Donate 19 Baht Wealthy! Wealthy! Wealthy!) and worshipping the Buddha image with nine incense sticks. The anticipation of meritorious results associated with the sacred implication of number nine encourages Thais to participate in *wai phra kao wat* practice, as it is perceived as a ‘doubly-meritorious’ action. For example, number nine is used to promote ‘*Thod Phapa Kathin Samakkhi 9 wat*’ (ทอดผ้าป่ากฐินสามัคคี 9 วัด, The Offering Robes Ceremony during the Lent Period at 9 temples) organised by *Rakhang khositaram* temple. The temple invited participants to donate money for being co-hosts of the meritorious activity. After donating 100 baht, they would receive an amulet. Khun Bunchu, a temple officer outlined the reasoning behind this programme;

Our temple aims to help many rural temples that still lack facilities. So, we decided to organise the *kathin* ceremony in order to raise funds for them. As you can see, there are a huge number of visitors and participants coming to our temple each day. The majority of the visitors are from *wai phra kao wat*. Then the committees agree to adopt the model structure of *wai phra kao wat* and organise ‘*Thod Phapa Kathin Samakkhi 9 wat*’. By doing this, we facilitate our recognition as the centre to raise funds for this campaign. We choose nine temples in rural areas and ask for the abbot’s permission. When all processes complete, we organise the practice by printing invitation letters for donors, setting up donating boxes and appointing an officer in charge of receiving donated money and gifts. Most of lay pilgrim-tourists are happy to join this activity as they consider it as a ‘big’ once-in-a-lifetime merit making.

(Interview Khun Boon chu, a temple officer,  
at Rakhang kosittaram temple, 3 June 2016)

Third, the Department of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Culture use number nine to symbolise the King Rama IX of Chakri dynasty. To do this, ‘*wai phra kao wat*

*seub siri sawat kao ratchakarn*’ (‘paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of the nine reigns in *Chakri* dynasty’; ‘ไหว้พระ9วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์รัชกาล’) was publicly organised throughout the year. One of the purposes of this campaign is to pay gratitude for the nine kings in Chakri dynasty especially King Rama IX who patronised Buddhism and established nation’s sustainability during his reign. This theme has also been reorganised in more complicated ways that I will further analyse within this chapter.

Due to the popularity of *wai phra kao wat*, number nine becomes an instrument to determine the model structure of popular religious practice. For instance, *Chetuphon Wimolmangkhalaram Ratchaworamahawiharn* temple (*Wat Pho*) cooperated with TAT to promote the activity *Nine Wonders of Wat Pho*. *Wat Pho* is included as the main destinations of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok. The activity was initially held on 27 September 2008 – 6 April 2009 at 7 – 10 pm<sup>98</sup>. This route is still recommended as an activity when visiting *Wat Pho*. The model structure of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok is also increasingly applied to promote religio-cultural practices in other provinces and various purposes such as *Ayutthaya Mahamongkhon 99 Wat* (The 99 Auspicious temples of Ayutthaya), *Wai Phra That 9 Aong* (Worshipping Buddhist relics at Nine *Stupas*, [reliquary monuments]), *Wai Phra Wang Naa Kao Aong* (Worshipping the nine Buddhist images collected in National Museum) and *Wai Anusawari 9 Kasat* (worshipping the monuments of nine kings in Chakri dynasty). Rhetorically, number nine in contemporary Thai society is not only to be employed in occult services but also to be interpreted in a positive sense. The figure is then used in variety of social practices in order to imply hidden messages about the occult and spiritual power that are convincing to civil society. Meanwhile, the dynamic application of number nine is also facilitated by government policies and capitalist development in order to formulate ‘new’ power that can contribute to the social stability and solidarity of Thai society (I will discuss later within this chapter).

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<sup>98</sup> The nine attractions in Wat Pho consist of Phra Buddhasaiyas, Satellite Pavillions, Phra Maha Chedi Si Rachakarn, The Legend of Songkran, The World Heritage Inscriptions, Wat Pho Giants, Sala Karn Parien, Phra Buddha Deva Patimakorn, and Contorted Hermit Mount.

Table 4.1. The promotion of activities by applying the number nine in the fieldwork study

Activities	Locations	Purposes and forms of practices
<i>Nine Wonders of Wat Pho</i> (9 สิ่งมหัศจรรย์วัดโพธิ์)	<i>Chetuphon wimonmangkhalararn ratchaworamahawiharn</i> temple ( <i>Wat Pho</i> )	<i>Wat Pho</i> , in cooperation with TAT, held this activity in which the nine attractions in the temple are selected and promoted in the campaign. The activity was part of the successful <i>Wai Phra Yam Kham Khuen</i> campaign (ไหว้พระยามค้ำคืน, paying homage to the Buddha at night), initially held from 27 September 2008 – 6 April 2009.
<i>Thot Phapa Kathin Samakkhi Kao Wat</i> (The Offering Robes Ceremony during the Lent Period at 9 temples; ทอดผ้าป่ากฐินสามัคคี 9 วัด)	<i>Rakhang khosittaram woramahavihara</i> (Wat Rakhang)	<i>Wat Rakhang</i> organised The Robe Offering Ceremony to raise funds for nine rural temples during 28 October – 25 November 2015. Participants receive an amulet when they donate more than 100 baht.
<i>Thambun 19 baht ruay ruay ruay</i> (Donate 19 Baht Wealthy! Wealthy! Wealthy!; ทำบุญ 19 บาท รวย รวย รวย)	<i>Arun ratchawararam woramahavihara</i> temple ( <i>Wat Arun</i> )	Participants are instructed that donating 19 baht will result in increased financial prosperity. Participants put their donation in the alms bowl of a figurine novice monk. The donated money is used to fund temple activities (Phra maha

		bunrung, Interviewed 28 March 2016)
<i>Bucha Aong Chao Pho Suea 999 baht</i> (Worshipping <i>Chao Pho Sua</i> , a Chinese deity 999 baht; บูชาองค์เจ้าพ่อเสือ 999 บาท)	<i>Arun Ratchawararam Woramahavihara</i> (Wat Arun)	Temple's staff sells framed portraits of <i>Chao Pho Sua</i> , a Chinese deity, at a cost of 999 baht. A portion of purchase is donated to the temple.
Selling T-shirts and polo shirts	Rama IX <i>Kanchanaphisek</i> temple (วัดพระรามเก้ากาญจนาภิเษก)	Temple's staff sells shirts in order to raise funds for the novice foundation of the temple. T-shirts are priced at 99 baht, polo shirts are 199 baht.
Making merit with gold leaf to build Buddhist image	<i>Thewarat kunchorn woravihara</i> temple	The ceremony, in which participants attach purchased gold leaves onto an image of the Buddha, was held on 5 April 2016 at 1.19 PM. The Buddha image purchased with the resulting funds measure 19 inches
Merit making with candle	<i>Arun Ratchawararam Woramahavihara</i> temple	Participants donate 49 baht and receive a candle believed to ward off bad spirits and promote good luck (ตะเคาะห์เคราะห์และนำโชค ลาก).

*The Origin of Auspicious Beliefs in Thai society*

Apart from the application of the number nine to religio-cultural practices, the formula of auspicious meaning determined as the objective of *wai phra kao wat* practice also impacts on the selection of temples and the expectations (ความคาดหวัง, *kwam khat wang*) of lay participants. According to Phra Maha Boonkhong Dhammikko<sup>99</sup>, a senior monk at *Suthat Thepwararam Woramahawiharn* temple, the rhetoric of auspiciousness or ‘*kwam mongkhol*’ (ความมงคล) originates from a Buddhist text called ‘*mongkhol sutta*’ (มงคลสูตร). This well-known sutta contains a doctrine entitled *Mongkhol Cheewit Samsippat Prakarn* (มงคลชีวิต 38 ประการ, 38 conditions for an auspicious life) in which an angel once asked the Buddha about the causes of happiness. The auspiciousness of *wai phra kao wat* practice was initially applied in a TAT promotion. The rhetorical application of auspiciousness in the *wai phra kao wat* practice, I argue, reflects social reality from two perspectives; on the one hand it reflects a realistic assessment towards living concerns in contemporary Thai society and, on the other hand, it illustrates the conservative objectives of the Thai state to appear to ameliorate economic deprivation and increase prosperity without the need to stimulate economic growth or challenge structural problems; a cynical religion-as-opium rhetoric. It is evident in the choice of temples (particularly the inclusion of temples considered especially auspicious before campaign) and the surrounding rhetoric of *wai phra kao wat*, that participation is intended individual and collective living standards and moral standing while simultaneously maintaining the pillars of nation, religion and monarchy. TAT designated the most popular 2004 route by associating the nine temples with the long-established folkloric belief in auspicious names and numbers. The relationship between auspicious meaning and meritorious practice rhetorically formulates the predominant aspects of *wai phra kao wat* in mass society. Consequently, *wai phra kao wat* will illustrate how TAT implicates auspiciousness into the practice and how both lay Thai people, the Thai state and members of the religious community facilitate symbolic and rhetorical dispositions embedded in *wai phra kao wat*.

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<sup>99</sup> Interview on 14 March 2016.

### *The Auspicious Formula of wai phra kao wat*

Stories are pressed into service as absolute metaphors as well. Consider Adam, Eve, the snake and the apple as proposing a view of the difficult relations of the sexes, or the story of the Buddha's struggle towards enlightenment as a view on how to find an abiding sense of well-being in this often troubled life. These are all materials that have been applied, and will continue to be applied on one occasion or another, to orient people among the vicissitudes of life.

(Carrithers 2009:9)

Carrithers's argument, I argue, can be applied to the application of auspicious formula of *wai phra kao wat* practice. The various 'vicissitudes of life' experienced by participants, be they ill health, financial insecurity, unsatisfactory career progression or troubled relationships, can be addressed by navigating a designated route through nine sacred spaces and correctly performing certain activities. In this sense it is possible to view *wai phra kao wat*, and this view is encouraged by TAT, as an absolute metaphor able to orient the Thai nation and people through their myriad tribulations. Amnat Suttachai, Promoting Tourism Officer 6 of TAT<sup>100</sup>, notes, 'we selected the route from the nine most popular temples in Bangkok that have "auspicious" names and historical significance according to Thai folkloric belief'. Regarding 'auspicious' name, the homophone between name and positive meaning is applied to orient the practice. These homophones include '*pai wat Kallaya*<sup>101</sup> *ja dai mee kallayanamitr*' (*Kalyana* means auspicious, good, fortunate. *Mitta* (Pali) or *mitra* (Sanskrit) means 'friend', 'visiting wat *Kallaya* will find *kallyanamitr*'; ไปวัดกัลยาณจะได้มีกัลยาณมิตร) and '*pai wat Suthat*<sup>102</sup> *ja dai mee thatsanakhati teedee*' (ไปวัดสุทัศนจะได้มีทัศนคติที่ดี, *Su* means good, *Thatsa* (Sanskrit) means 'vision, attitude', 'visiting wat *Suthat* will give you a good attitude').

Table 4.2. The rhetorical description towards meaning significance of the temples relating to the blessing goals based on Thai folk beliefs ('a formula of auspicious future')

<sup>100</sup> Interview on 20 January 2015

<sup>101</sup> *Kallaya* means a friend and *kallyanamitr* means a good friend.

<sup>102</sup> *Su-* (สุ-) means good and *That* (ทัศน) or *Thatsana* (ทัศนะ) means attitude.



<b>Temples</b>	<b>Blessing goals</b>	<b>The relation between the temples' names and blessing goals based on Thai folk beliefs</b>
<i>Kallayanamit woramahavihara</i> temple (wat Kallaya)	Blessing for good companions and friendship	<i>Kallaya</i> (กัลยาณ-) means good and <i>Mit</i> (มิตร) means friend or companion
<i>Chanasongkram rachaworamahavihara</i> temple (wat Chana or wat Chanasongkram)	Blessing for the victory when you are in competition or contest	<i>Chana</i> (ชนะ) means win or victory and <i>Songkram</i> (สงคราม) means war
<i>Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkalaram rachawaramahavihara</i> temple (wat Pho)	Blessing for healthy and long-lasting life	<i>Pho</i> (โพธิ์; the species name is <i>Ficus religiosa</i> ) is the tree under which the Buddha sat when he gained enlightenment. Thais respects the <i>bhodhi</i> tree as it symbolises the Buddha and the establishment of Buddhism in Thailand
<i>Phra Srirattana Satsadaram rachaworamahavihara</i> temple (wat Phra Kaew)	Blessing for wealth and material possessions (ทรัพย์สินสมบัติ)	<i>Kaew</i> (แก้ว) symbolises valuable objects as Thai colloquial phrase, “ <i>Kaew Waen Ngern Thong</i> ” (แก้วแหวนเงินทอง) (‘ <i>Kaew</i> ’ means precious stones, ‘ <i>Waen</i> ’ means ring, ‘ <i>Ngern</i> ’ means money, and ‘ <i>Thong</i> ’ means gold.)
<i>Rakhang Khositaram woramahavihara</i> temple (wat Rakhang)	Blessing for prominence and fascination	<i>Rakhang</i> (ระฆัง) literally means bell. According to the resonant sound of the bell, it symbolises prominence and social recognition (มีชื่อเสียงโด่งดังเหมือนเสียงของระฆัง)
<i>Suthat Thewararam woramahavihara</i> temple (wat Suthat)	Blessing for good vision (farsightedness,	<i>Su</i> (สุ) means good, <i>That</i> (ทัศน), which comes from <i>Thatsana</i> (ทัศนะ) means attitude

	acuteness, ingenuity) (มีวิสัยทัศน์ที่ ดี)	
<i>Arun Rachawararam woramahavihara temple (wat Arun)</i>	Blessing for prosperity (ความ เจริญรุ่งเรือง)	<i>Arun</i> means the sun. According to the sunlight and sunbeam, it symbolises brightness.
<i>Baworn Niwet Rachaworavihara temple (wat Baworn)</i>	Blessing for good luck	<i>Baworn</i> means good and advancement.
<i>Saked Rachaworamahawiharn temple (wat Saked, wat Phu Khao Thong)</i>	Blessing for intellectual	<i>Sa</i> (สระ) means washing or cleaning and <i>Ked</i> (เกศ) means head.

Apart from this, the TAT also applies the temples' history to convey the significance of each destination and to provide the intended results of the offerings and activities. These supposed results promoted by the TAT already held a rhetorical significance in the popular Thai imagination; both from the figurative expression relating to the temples' colloquial names and their history. As I learned during fieldwork, the significance of the colloquial names was easily understood and used by lay participants. The narrative of historical background, however, still plays a significant role in providing individual temples with the sheen of auspiciousness. These histories, as presented in TAT brochures and promotional literature, also imply the significance of national stability that I will further analyse in the next section. Again, TAT, I argue, establishes the standard or 'norm' of *wai phra kao wat* in Thailand. In this following, the description of the nine temples is suggested from TAT documents and brochures about the brief history of the temples, TAT recommendation about offering things which compare to the nine temples' significance based on historical significance and Thai folkloric beliefs, in order to express the structural model of *wai phra kao wat* practice in Bangkok:

1) *Kallayanamitr woramahavihara* Temple (วัดกัลยาณมิตรวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as *Wat Kallaya* (วัดกัลยาณมิตร), is situated in Thonburi<sup>103</sup> along Chao Phraya River. The monastery

<sup>103</sup> *Thonburi* is the old city of Bangkok.

was built in 1837 by Chao phraya Nikorn Bodinthorn (Chao Sua Toh<sup>104</sup>). According to the TAT-produced biography, he was a close friend of King Rama II because he was appointed as a civil servant principally responsible for international business administration, a special interest of Rama II. He devoted his land and funds to build a royal monastery, which, when finished was named by king Rama III as *Kallayanamitr* which literally means good friend in Sanskrit (*'kallaya'* means good, *'mitr'* means friend or companion). Based on interviews, when participants come to *Wat Kallaya*, they expected blessings that would ensure good friendship and business achievement, and these expectations were explicitly related to the historical presence of temple founder. Moreover, the Chinese identity of the founder, the architectural style and overall aesthetic symbolise Chinese folk beliefs, makes the temple particularly auspicious for the large urban population of Sino-Thai participants. This connection with Chinese folkloric practices is emphasised in the activities offered at the temple. Participants use a pair of red candles representing good luck in Chinese belief and there are statues of *phra sangkajjai* and a little shrine of *kuan yin*, the two most popular Chinese cult figures. Regarding the TAT administration of *wai phra kao wat*, *Wat Kallaya* was selected as one of the nine destinations with the additional blessing slogan '*dern thang plodphai, mee mitr maitree tee dee*' ('travel safely with good companions'; เดินทางปลอดภัย มีมิตรไมตรีที่ดี). The TAT further recommended offering three incense sticks, a pair of red candles and flowers or garland and marked interesting landmarks to visit in the temple sphere. For example, the TAT organiser recommends visiting the bell hall, recognised as the biggest one in Thailand, and the statue of *Luang Phor Toh*, the biggest Buddhist image in Thailand situated in the main temple<sup>105</sup>.

2) *Chanasongkram rajaworamahavihara* Temple (วัดชนะสงครามราชวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as *Wat Chana* or *Wat Chanasongkram*, is situated in *Phra Nakorn* district. Originally named '*Wat Klangna*' (วัดกลางนา) due to its geographical location surrounded by rice fields, the temple was renovated by *Krom phrarachawang baworn mahasurasinghanath* (กรมพระราชวังบวรมหาสุรสิงหนาท) (1743 – 1803) after a victory against the Burmese and renamed as '*Wat Chanasongkram*' to celebrate his victory. *Chana* (ชนะ) means win or victory, *songkram* (สงคราม) means war. In interviews, local Thais who visited

<sup>104</sup> *Chao sua Toh* (เจ้าสัวโต) is his former calling name. *Chao sua* symbolically represents a Chinese-blooded millionaire.

<sup>105</sup> Interview Amnat Suttachai, a TAT officer on 15 June 2015.

*Wat Chanasangkrum* reported doing so for the blessing of life achievement when they encountered difficulties or wanted to pass exams or be successful in job applications. Reflecting this belief, the TAT designated the temple with the slogan ‘overcoming all life struggles’ (มีชัยชนะต่ออุปสรรคทั้งปวง). Additionally, the TAT recommended preparing two sets of offerings; one for the Buddha image in the main temple <sup>106</sup> and the other for *Krom phrarachawang baworn mahasurasinghanath*, the temple’s founder <sup>107</sup>.

3) *Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkalaram Rajawaramahavihara* Temple (วัดพระเชตุพนวิมลมังคลารามราชวรมหาวิหาร), according to *Sila Charuek Wat Pho* (ศิลาจารึกวัดโพธิ์, the inscription of *Wat Pho*), built on the previous location of the much smaller *Wat Photharam* or *Wat Pho*, is regarded as the oldest monastery from the Ayutthaya period<sup>108</sup>. Located in the *Phra Nakhorn* district, King Rama I rebuilt to promote as a royal temple and then renamed the temple as ‘*Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimolmangkalawat*’ in 1789. Later, in the reign of Rama IV shifted the ending of the name to ‘*Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimolmangkalaram*’ instead. According to the lexical meaning, ‘*chetuphon*’ (เชตุพน) means the temple of Buddha, ‘*wimol*’ (วิมล) means purity, ‘*mangkala*’ (มังคละ) which comes from ‘*mongkhol*’ (มงคล) means good fortune. Moreover, the establishment of *Wat phra chetuphon wimolmangkalaram* also represents the stability of Buddhist institution in Thailand as rhetorically said ‘*wat khu ban khu meung*’ (the national temple which is built at the same time of the establishment of Bangkok as the capital city. This temple is recognised as a treasury of Thailand; วัดคู่บ้านคู่เมือง). These significances rhetorically empower the spiritual virtues of the temple. To clarify this, when you come to *Wat Pho*, local Thais believe you are blessed with peace and happiness (*rom yen pen suk*; ร่มเย็นเป็นสุข). Reflecting this belief, TAT designated a slogan, ‘the destination for happiness and peace’ to promote *wat pho* as a destination in *wai phra kao wat*. It also suggested the offering things including three incense sticks, a pair of candles, and eleven pieces of gold foil.

4) *Phra Srirattana Satsadaram Rachaworamahavihara* Temple (วัดพระศรีรัตนศาสดารามราชวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as *Wat Phra Kaeo* (วัดพระแก้ว) is located in the grounds of Grand

<sup>106</sup> The offerings for the Buddhist image consist of three incense sticks, a yellow candle, and a lotus.

<sup>107</sup> The offerings for *Krom phrarachawang baworn mahasurasinghanath* consist of five incense sticks, a yellow candle, and a lotus.

<sup>108</sup> It is assumed that *Wat Photharam* was built as a local temple after 1688 during the reign of King Narai (1656 – 1688).

Palace, the historical centre of Bangkok. The temple is regarded as the most important Buddhist temple in Thailand because *Phra Kaeo Morakot* (the Emerald Buddha; พระแก้วมรกต), the highly revered Buddha image meticulously carved from a single block of jade, is situated in the main temple. The historical significance of the temple as well as the sacredness of the Emerald Buddha attracts all walks of life to visit. Associated with Thai folkloric belief (คติความเชื่อ, *khati khwam chuea*), the Emerald Buddha symbolically represents wealth and prosperity. Reflecting this belief, local Thais bless *Phra Kaeo Morakot* for material prosperity by intoning ‘*Wai Phra Kaeo Morakot Cha Udom Duay Kaeo Waen Ngern Thong*’ (‘worshipping the Emerald Buddha is ritually charged with prosperous power. The worshippers will gain valuable objects like jewellery, rings, money, and gold’; ไหว้พระแก้วมรกตจะอุดมด้วยแก้วแหวนเงินทอง). Based on the TAT campaign, it designated a slogan, ‘the destination for purifying mind by *Rattana*’<sup>109</sup> to promote *Wat Phra Kaeo* as a destination in *wai phra kao wat*. TAT also suggested the offering things consisting of three incense sticks, a candle, and flower.

5) *Rakhang Khositaram Woramahavihara Temple* (วัดระฆังโฆสิตารามวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as ‘*Wat Rakhang*,’ is located in Bangkok Noi district, Thonburi side. Historically, *Wat Rakhang* was built in the late of Ayutthaya period<sup>110</sup>. *Wat Rakhang* was the residence of king Rama IV during his monkhood. Also, *Chao Phra Khun Somdet Buddhajan Toh Phromrangsi* (*Somdet Budhacariya*, *Toh Brahmaransi* known as *Somdet Toh*; เจ้าพระคุณสมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์ โต พรหมรังสี), who is regarded as the most famous magical monk in Thailand, used to be the abbot of this temple during the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V. According to the interview with *Phra khru Sangkharattapanya Worapanyamethi*<sup>111</sup> (พระครูสังฆรัตตปัญญา วรปัญญาเมธี), both the historical significance and the efficacy (*khwam saksit*; ความศักดิ์สิทธิ์) made *Wat Rakhang* attractive not only for the Buddhists but for all visitors around the world. Moreover, he also mentioned rhetorical symbols of the temple such as *Yim Rab Fah*, the name of the principle Buddhist image and *Rakhang*, the name of the temple. The auspicious meanings together with the cult belief of magic power of *Somdet Toh* play the crucial role of the temple’s recognition. To

<sup>109</sup> The slogan is rhetorically related to the official name of the temple, “*Wat Phra Sri Rattana Satsadaram*”. That is to say, “*Rattana*” (รัตน) comes from “*Rattana*” (รัตน) (รัตน, the three gems of Buddhism) which signifies the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

<sup>110</sup> The former name of *Wat Rakhang* is *Wat Bangwa Yai*.

<sup>111</sup> Interviewed on 20 July, 2016.

clarify this, the Buddhist image named *Yim Rab Fah*, (*Yim* [ยิ้ม] means smile) (*Rab* [รับ] means receive) (*Fah* [ฟ้า] means sky) situated in *ubosot* (the consecrated assembly hall used for ordination ceremony; อุโบสถ) signifies the positive meaning. Similarly, the name of the temple '*Rakhang*' (bell; ระฆัง) rhetorically relates to the cult of *Wat Rakhang* that when people pay homage to the Buddha image at *Wat Rakhang*, they will have a good life and be beloved person (มีชีวิตที่ดีและเป็นที่รัก). It is as if the bell is ringing reverberantly, spreading good luck and prosperity for the believers<sup>112</sup>. Reflecting with this belief, TAT applied to promote *Wat Rakhang* as 'the blessing destination for being prominent and fascinating to others' in the *wai phra kao wat* practice. The offerings suggested by TAT are three incense sticks, a pair of candles and a piece of gold foil.

6) *Suthat Thepwararam woramahavihara* Temple (วัดสุทัศนเทพวรารามวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as '*Wat Suthat*', was completely built in 1847 during the reign of King Rama III. It is located near the Giant Swing (*Sao chingcha*; เสาชิงช้า), *Phra nakorn* district. Following the lexical meaning of the name, '*su-*' (สุ) means good, '*that*' (ทัศน), which comes from *Thatsana* (ทัศนะ) means attitude, '*thep*' (เทพ) means divine spirits, *wara* (วร-) means great, '*(a-)ram*' ([อา]ราม) means temple. Reflecting these rhetorical meanings, local Thais believe that *Wat Suthat* is ritually charged with the blessing for positive attitude and visionary. TAT designated the auspicious slogan for *Wat Suthat*, 'having broad vision and being fascinating to others' and also suggested the offerings including three incense sticks and a candle.

7) *Arun Rachawararam Woramahavihara* Temple (วัดอรุณราชวรารามวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as '*Wat Arun*,' is regarded as the temple signature in *Thonburi* period. It was built during the establishment of *Thonburi* kingdom. After that in the reign of King Rama II of *Rattanakosin* era, the temple was renovated, renamed as '*Wat Arun Ratchatharam*' and promoted as the royal temple of King Rama II. King Rama IV again changed the ending of the temple's name to '*Arun Rachawararam*' as still using in the present. Besides the prominence of the biggest *stupa* (the reliquary monument) in Thailand and the meticulous architectural style of *Wat Arun*, the naming of the temple crucially plays a rhetorical role in Thai perception. Regarding the auspicious meaning, '*Arun*' (อรุณ) means brightness or illumination, '*Racha*' (ราช) means king, '*Wora*' (วร-) means great, '*(a-)ram*' ([อา]ราม)

<sup>112</sup> Interview *Phra khru Sangkharattapanya Worapanyamethi*, July 20, 2016.

means temple. Reflecting this, Thais believe that *Wat Arun* rhetorically presents the destination to achieve blessing for a prosperous life (วัดรุ่งโรจน์). TAT also designated the slogan of *Wat Arun*, ‘the blessing destination for a prosperous life all day and night’ (วัดรุ่งโรจน์ทั้งคืนวัน) and suggested the offerings consisting of three incense sticks and a pair of candle.

8) *Bawon Niwet Rachaworavihara* Temple (วัดบวรนิเวศราชวรวิหาร), locally known as ‘*Wat Bowon*,’ is located in *Phra Nakorn* district. It was built in 1824 – 1832 during the reign of King Rama III. The interesting point is that many kings in Chakri dynasty like King Rama V, Rama VI and Rama IX resided here during their monkhood. Moreover, historically, the three Supreme Patriarchs<sup>113</sup> used to be former abbots of this temple. In terms of the auspicious implication, the naming of the temple comes from Pali language: ‘*Pavara*’ (‘*bawon*’ [บวร] in Thai means excellence) and ‘*Niwesa*’ (‘*niwet*’ [นิเวศ] in Thai means residence) which rhetorically represents the Excellence Abode Monastery. TAT designated the slogan by applying the positive meaning of ‘*Bawon*’ to promote as ‘receiving all the good things in the life’ and suggested the offerings including nine incense sticks, a candle, and three lotuses.

9) *Saket Rachaworamahavihara* Temple (วัดสระเกศราชวรมหาวิหาร), locally known as ‘*Wat Saket*’ or ‘*Wat Phukao Thong*’ (Temple of the Golden Mount; วัดภูเขาทอง) is rebuilt in the reign of King Rama I<sup>114</sup>. Historically, the naming of the temple, ‘*Saket*’<sup>115</sup>, was entitled from the historical significance. Once king Rama I came back from the riot control against Cambodia in *Thonburi*. He dropped here to clean his body. The Golden Mount (*Phukao Thong*; ภูเขาทอง or *Phra Borom Banpot*; พระบรมบรรพต), the temple’s landmark, was built during the reign of King Rama III – King Rama V to reside the Buddhist relics. Regarding the architectural style, *Phukao Thong* imitated from the golden pagoda at *Wat Phukao Thong* in Ayutthaya province. It was designed as the mountain model which situated the golden pagoda on the top. When participants visit *Wat Saket*, they will climb up to the golden pagoda to worship the Buddhist relics and, symbolically, to perform as an act of going to the heaven. TAT designated *Wat Saket* to bless for the

<sup>113</sup>The three of Supreme Patriarchs are *Somdet Phra Sangharaj Chao Krom Luang Vajirayanavongse* (1921 – 1958), *Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara* (1961 – 2015), and *Somdet Phra Vannarat* (2015 – present)

<sup>114</sup> The former name of the temple is *Wat Sa-kae* (วัดสระเก).

<sup>115</sup> Literally, ‘*sa*’ (สระ) means to clean and ‘*ked*’ (เกศ) means head. This term is especially employed for the king dynasty and the Buddha.

auspicious mind (*serm sang kwam kid an pen siri mongkhol*; เสริมสร้างความคิดอันเป็นสิริมงคล) in *wai phra kao wat* and also recommended the offerings consisting of nine incense sticks, a candle, and three lotuses.

The processes of meaning making and interpretation exemplified in the ‘sacred’ metaphor of number nine and the various formulas of auspiciousness become mass-oriented features of religio-cultural practices in modern days such as ‘wai phra 99 aong in Ayutthaya’ (‘paying homage to the ninety-nine Buddhist images in Ayutthaya’; ไหว้พระ 99องค์ จังหวัดพระนครศรีอยุธยา) and ‘sen thang mongkhol 9 sai’ (‘The nine auspicious routes in Thailand organised by TAT’; เส้นทางมงคล9สาย). Regardless of their social rank, contemporary Thais cannot remain isolated from the ‘circuits of folk cultures and creativity’ (Durrenberger 1996: 17). They become an integral constituent of social matters whether in obvious or hidden transcript. The rhetorical significance addressing the formulation of sacred and auspicious meanings into the constituents of *wai phra kao wat* can be further implied as a source of power for both Thai individuals and the state. Although they agree to support the practice, the rhetorical interpretation towards values of the practice is exploited in different roles and perspectives that I will discuss in the following section.

## 2.2 The rhetorical interpretation of the socio-cultural significance of wai phra kao wat in contemporary Thai society

The rhetorical dichotomies of *kwam sabai jai* upon which *wai phra kao wat* is based seem to be, I argue, distinctive between a people-oriented interpretation and a state-oriented interpretation. Although *wai phra kao wat* is mutually recognised as an alternative form of religious tourism in contemporary Thai society, Thai citizens and officials approach and respond to the practice differently. For example, on one hand, most Thai citizens anticipate the practice will simultaneously provide senses of sacredness and entertainment that is rhetorically perceived as a solution to the vicissitudes of modern Thai life. The state, on the other hand, facilitates the practice as an ‘invented’ form of Buddhist practice which is regarded as ‘dhamma tourism’ (*kan thong thiew sheng thamma*; การท่องเที่ยวเชิงธรรมะ) (The Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture, 2016). Reflecting the main objectives of the practice, the state, in the form of the Department of Religious Affairs, promote *wai phra kao wat* as an alternative form of



religious tourism in Thailand that promotes and sacralises the three official institutions (state, religion, and monarchy) of Thailand. The organisers exploit the practice as a state-oriented activity to publicise a number of state policies such as ‘Returning *kwam suk* to Thai people’ (‘*khuen kwam suk hai kab prachachon*’; คืนความสุขให้กับประชาชน), Twelve Cores Values (‘*kha niyom sib song prakarn*’; ค่านิยม 12 ประการ), ‘*Baworn*’ policy (นโยบายบวร), and ‘*Phracharath*’ policy (‘state-people policy’; นโยบายประชารัฐ). The state policies previously mentioned will be elaborated in the next section. It is eventually, I argue, a new source of intentionally unquestionable state power that is meant to rectify social conflicts and unify the modern Thai nation.

### *Wai phra kao wat from a citizen’s perspective*

The meanings and activities of *wai phra kao wat* designated by TAT represent mundane desires of living pleasure; health, work achievement, love or companionship, and wealth, all of which are arguably antithetical to the Buddhist goal of Nirvana. However, these mundane goals are implicitly suggested by the persuasive power embedded in the religio-cultural practices. These practices have been transformed into marketable commodities with values mundanely measured by money like any other exchangeable goods (Pattana 2008: 134). Arguably, the application of figurative speech of *wai phra kao wat* is also validated as an ‘invented’ solution for vicissitudes of Thai life in modernity especially from the narrative experiences of individuals and the mass media. Baudrillard (1994) manifests ‘the production and consumption of sacralised amulets and other auspicious objects constitute a form of “religious hyperreality”, a mode of representation led by “the image and its manipulation by the media” ’ (Pattana 2012: 108). Durrenberger (2008: 74) argues a ‘multimedia event’ attempts to convince everyone to feel the same way. For instance, owing to folkloric Thai beliefs in fate, destiny and the law of karma (merit and demerit; บุญและบาป; ‘*boon lae bap*’), *wai phra kao wat* is rhetorically considered a ‘substantial’ meritorious field, which is then ideally considered as a spiritual solution for vicissitudes of modern Thai life. The charisma of *wai phra kao wat*, retold by influential agents such as astrologers, media representatives and public figures, has massive impacts on Thai people’s understanding and mass application in a socio-cultural context. *Wai phra kao wat* in mass media therefore rhetorically illustrates the paradoxical agreement between citizens and officials towards the ‘invented’ roles of the practice.

*The rhetorical application of the sacredness of wai phra kao wat*

The implication of *kwam saksit* (sacredness or efficacy; ศักดิ์สิทธิ์) and *kwam mongkhol* (auspiciousness; ความมงคล) oriented in *wai phra kao wat* rhetorically postulates an ‘invented’ role as a ‘modern’ ritual performance advocated by astrologers and magic persons. They explicitly interpret the practice as a living solution to the complications of contemporary Thai society. Astrologers, who are believed to be able to communicate and negotiate with extraordinary and invisible power, I argue, influentially contribute a unique characteristic to *wai phra kao wat* practice in the Thai perception. Cook (2002: 189) argues that ‘astrology is an intrinsic part of Thai thought and of the Thai way of life’. Most Thais consult astrologers to determine ‘appropriate’ actions and ‘effective’ solutions before undertaking risky or challenging activities, such as auspicious times for starting new businesses and ‘good’ locations for business ventures. Positive and auspicious meanings are imbued a sense of efficacy which is often exploited to generate occult power in religious commodities (see details in chapter 4). Associated with *wai phra kao wat*, for example, many themes and activities are relevant to the sacred power which is interpreted as either a mental solution for difficulties or a religio-cultural product in the modern market system (see in chapter 4). Astrologers therefore play a crucial role in convincingly interweaving sacred quality into a religious practice, as well as promoting *wai phra kao wat* as a ‘trendy’ ritual practice on social media networks.

Astrologers and similar figures often link the source of their own supernatural skills with the practice itself. Mr. Chiang Pannawit, a famous-35-year-old astrologer and fengshui instructor, introduced himself by mentioning *wai phra kao wat* as a turning point of his magical awareness and career path during a notable TV interview in 2016 <sup>116</sup>;

...One day during the New Year festival, my friends and I like other teenagers attended *Wai Phra Kao Wat* to celebrate New Year. ***After that the miracle happened and changed my whole life.*** I decided to complete my nine-temple journey at *Bowonniwet* Vihara Temple. At that time someone said, “*Phra Yannasangwararam*, the supreme patriarch of Sangha, is here today at *Khoi Tha Pramote* Palace...” Immediately, I decided to prostrate myself at his feet to express my veneration. I saw that his feet were not at all like those of ordinary people. His feet were plump which was like a conch shape. When I touched his

<sup>116</sup> Broadcasting in *Shae* (๙๙) programme, GMM 25 television channel on 1 June 2016.

feet, I was stunned as if I had an electric shock. Suddenly, he bowed his head down and nodded with his smiley face at me. *This moment touched my heart forever. I believed that this is the first time that I have already found ‘kruba ajarn’ (a holy teacher) for my career path as an astrologer.*

The agent (Ajarn Chiang) described *wai phra kao wat* as the original background of his acquisition of supernatural abilities. It is further related to his unique living conditions including his career path and social status. The story also reflects the ‘sacred’ validation of this practice. This kind of narrative structure has been repetitively broadcast in Thai mass media. Unsurprisingly, many Thais approach *wai phra kao wat* practice with the acknowledgment of sacred values suggested by the influential agents. The practice then becomes widely recognised as a ‘trendy’ activity and at the same time converted into a ‘new’ socio-cultural product in the contemporary context.

For example, the *wai phra kao wat* route created by Mor Yong <sup>117</sup> is one of the original routes designated in Bangkok (See in chapter 3). He promoted the practice as a spiritual means to ‘*serm duang chata*’ (‘to uplift spiritual power of life’; เสริมดวงชะตา). He published a *Wai Phra Kao Wat*’s guidebook entitled ‘*Khu Meu Cheevit 2548: Maha Mongkhon Cheevit Wai Phra Kao Wat*’ (‘The 2005 guidebook for auspicious living with Wai Phra Kao Wat’; คู่มือชีวิต 2548 มหามงคลชีวิต ไหว้พระแก้ววัด). In his book, he interpreted *wai phra kao wat* as a ‘substantially auspicious’ practice for new beginnings; ‘*Wan Kheun Pee Mai* [New Year’s day] is the beginning of a new life which can change for the better or the worse’ (Suriyan 2005). The *wai phra kao wat* designated by Mor Yong has the City Pillar Shrine of Bangkok as the initial landmark. He explains that, ‘based on Thai folkloric belief, the City Pillar Shrine symbolizes the centre of Bangkok city and also the landmark of the country. Additionally, the City Pillar Shrine is believed to be replete with deities and spiritual power that we assume are able to encourage a better future and achievement’. Since that day, the rhetorical interpretation of *wai phra kao wat* by Mor Yong generates an ‘invented’ tradition on Thai New Year festival which is to say the ‘new’ social norm of contemporary Thai life.

Similarly, Thosaporn Sritula (also known as *Mor Chang*), a famous fortuneteller and fengshui instructor in Thailand, designates *wai phra kao wat* as a modern living

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<sup>117</sup> Mr. Suriyan Sujaritphromwong (16 November 1962 – 7 November 2015) known as *Mor Yong* was one of the most famous astrologers from the 1990s to 2015.

solution for *Pee Chong* (a bad year in the Chinese year cycle; ปีชง) and a mental solution for bad luck <sup>118</sup>. The practice is then known as ‘*Wai Phra Kao Wat Kae Pee Chong*’ (‘paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples to ward off bad spirits according to the Chinese calendric year’; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดแก้ปีชง). He also wrote a book entitled ‘Phayakorn Duang Pee 2559’ (‘The casting of horoscope in 2016’; พยกรณ์ดวงปี 2559). He mentioned that those whose birth year fall under the inauspicious or ‘*pee chong*’ should practise *Wai Phra Kao Wat* during the Chinese New Year Festival (6 – 13 February 2016) as a protective method from bad luck. Due to popularity, this special ceremony called ‘*pat tua kae pee chong*’ (‘the ritual ceremony of warding off bad spirits according to the Chinese calendric year’; ปัดตัวแก้ปีชง) is held annually during the Chinese New Year at the nine temples’ sites. Another interpretation of the significance of *wai phra kao wat* is by another popular Thai fortune teller, Luck Rekahnithed (also known as *Mor Luck*). He argues that the symbolic significance of individual temples differently compels laity’s attention to the sacred quality. On 8 August 2016, I interviewed him at *wat sa ket* as he led his team to make an offering, an image of the Buddha, at *chedi phukhao Thong* (the biggest pagoda in Bangkok located on Golden Mountain at the top of *wat sa ked*, เจดีย์ภูเขาทอง). He explained, ‘*phukhao thong* at *wat sa ked* based on Thai folkloric belief is identified as the mountain at the centre of the universe known as *khao phra sumeru*. It is believed to be the habitation of spirits and the sacred power of either the Buddha or sacred deities. So, *wat sa ked* is appropriately chosen as one of the nine temples destination because worshippers, or even tourists, gain not only merit but the sacred power of the temple and deities which spiritually encourage achievement and auspiciousness as you wish.’ <sup>119</sup>

The mass media, aided by entrepreneurial fortune tellers and astrologers, play an explicit role in determining the sacred qualities of *wai phra kao wat* and magic persons like astrologers and fortunetellers. At the end of the year, a number of Thai television programmes as well as social media channels will invite famous astrologers and fortunetellers to be interviewed for their predictions for the following year. When discussing any anticipated difficulties in life, they will suggest solutions. *Wai phra kao wat* is often accounted in a modern solution to resolve ‘bad’ predictions. Astrologers and fortunetellers are therefore key figures who establish a construed meaning of *wai phra*

<sup>118</sup> His interviews are in *Cheevit dee dee* programme, Channel 33 (4 January 2017), [www.bangkokbiznews.com](http://www.bangkokbiznews.com) (25 January 2017), and *Thairath* online (4 March 2016).

<sup>119</sup> Interview Mr. Luck Rekahnithed on 8 August 2016 at Phukao Thong, Sa ked Rachawaramahavihara temple.

*kao wat* as a sacred practice from the rhetorical perspective. The *wai phra kao wat* practice then represents a solution for living difficulties in contemporary Thailand.

According to the influential voices of astrologers, *wai phra kao wat* is acknowledged as an alternative source of ‘sacred’ power when Thais encounter difficulties. For instance, a woman in her late 50s participating in *wai phra kao wat* according to her fortuneteller’s prediction <sup>120</sup>, notes,

Since I have had a bad stomach ache for more than a month, I went to diagnose my disease in many hospitals. Unfortunately, the doctors could not treat my symptoms and I felt worse day by day. Also, my daughter had bad dreams for many nights last week. She told me that while she was sleeping, she felt that somebody strangled her throat so tightly that she could not breathe. She was really panicked and afraid of developing insomnia. So, I decided to ask a fortuneteller for advice about these miseries. ***The fortuneteller recommended me to abstain from meat for a month and participate in wai phra kao wat as a way to “khor khama kam” (apologies for bad kamma from a previous life; ขอขมากรรม).*** During our participation in *wai phra kao wat*, my daughter and I had to offer 99 eggs and red water at *Wat Sa ked*, as the Golden Mount of *Wat Sa ked* is the highest landmark of Bangkok. It is symbolically close to the Buddha and deities for doing *khor khama* (begging apology; ขอขมา (and begging for immediate recovery. I hope that my daughter and I will soon recover.

The sacred quality of *wai phra kao wat* is also converted into an occult power (see in chapter 4). The acquisition of occult power in sacred implication of *wai phra kao wat* generates the emergence of socio-cultural products in the new market system. Either public authorities or tourism companies propose the sacred quality of *wai phra kao wat* in media advertisement and promotion strategy. For example, a 42-year-old businessman from Ratchaburi province participated in *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok in order to collect ‘*nam mon*’ (lustral water; น้ำมนต์) from the nine temples <sup>121</sup>. After he came back to Ratchaburi province, he mixed ‘*nam mon kao wat*’ (lustral water from the nine temples; น้ำมนต์เก้าวัด) with his herbal drinks for sales. He advertised his product entitled as ‘*khrueng*

<sup>120</sup> Interview on 6 August 2016.

<sup>121</sup> Interview on 20 June 2016.

*duem samoonphrai mongkhon*’ (auspicious herbal drinks; เครื่องดื่มสมุนไพรมงคล). He describes *nam mon kao wat* is ritually charged as a ‘sacred’ ingredient for his products which is believed to contribute *siri mongkhon* (auspiciousness; สิริมงคล) for customers. He said that, ‘my sales are continuously increasing as, I think, they are not merely tasty but the “auspicious” acquisition, a marketing strategy, is able to satisfy my customers’. The sacred implication of *wai phra kao wat* therefore rhetorically interprets as an emerging source of ‘new’ marketing strategy to provide occult money.

Additionally, *wai phra kao wat* is used to bolster the corporate image of many businesses regarding their ethical practices. They offer special promotions and designate alternative routes and activities of *wai phra kao wat* for employees and customers. For example, Tesco Lotus, a retail department store, launched a campaign, ‘*Long reau wai phra kao wat rim mae nam chao phraya*’ (paying homage to the nine temples along Chao Phraya River by boat; ล่องเรือไหว้พระเก้าวัดริมแม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา). The organiser offered a special promotion, ‘Buy one get one free 599 baht’<sup>122</sup> when customers purchased tickets at Tesco Lotus’ counter services from 1 August – 30 September 2016. AIS, a communicating service provider company, launched a campaign for prestige customers as a birthday present. It offers a half-priced promotion for the customers, who have registered contact number with AIS for over 10 years, during their birth month. Lactasoy launched a campaign ‘*Lactasoy rally kan kusol wai phra kao wat krung thep – rayong krang tee 14*’ (The 14th Charity Rally by Lactasoy [a soya milk distributing company of Thailand]: Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples from Bangkok to Rayong province [a province in eastern part of Thailand]; แลกตาซอย แรลลี่การกุศล ไหว้พระเก้าวัด กรุงเทพฯ-ระยอง) on 28 February 2015. In this occasion, the company also donated money to the nine temple destinations.

The implication of sacredness in *wai phra kao wat* rhetorically induces *kwam sabai jai* in perception of nearly all of participants. Also, encouraged by the influential voices like astrologers and fortunetellers, *wai phra kao wat* is considered as a new source of occult power. As folkloric beliefs of sacredness and supernatural power intrinsically persist in Thai thought and way of life, the sacred expression has been developed and applied in solving spiritual problems such as the anxiety about uncertain future. It is because scientific and technological advancement cannot figure these problems out. Due to its overwhelming popularity, the rhetoric of *kwam saksit* (sacredness) and *kwam*

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<sup>122</sup> It is approximately £13.

*mongkhol* (auspiciousness) also plays a part in conveying power of *wai phra kao wat* practice. It is exploited not only by Thai individuals but also by the Thai state. Arguably, *wai phra kao wat* rhetorically provides a source of *kwam sabai jai* for the entire Thai society and a construed measurement of ethical standard of ‘good’ Thainess through the lens of public Thai authorities.

## Conclusion

Due to the diverse applications of *wai phra kao wat*, ‘invented’ characters of this popular Buddhist practice rhetorically postulate *kwam sabai jai* for both people and the Thai state. McDaniel (2011: 103) contends that ‘the letters, numbers, and drawings used in the formulas are indices, not symbols. They are believed to directly cause events or protect objects if chanted, drawn, or tattooed correctly and with the right focus. These equations do things. They solve problems.’ Associated with *wai phra kao wat*, the features combined in this invented practice such as number nine and auspicious formula effectively bolster the satisfaction and contentment. The laity is satisfied with the spiritual power of *kwam saksit* (efficacy) whereas the Thai state is satisfied with uncontroversial power founded on the rhetoric of Buddhism. It persuades people to live in peace and unity. *Wai phra kao wat* is more than a crossover of mere religious tourism in contemporary Thai society. Rather, it provides an emerging sphere of negotiation and communication. The combination of folkloric belief in sacredness and auspiciousness along with modern tourism effectively persuades Thai people to perceive religious values with new interpretations and socio-cultural meanings.

According to the political perspective, state force seems to be outdated and restrictive because it generates anticipated violence in society. As a result, the recent state utilises subtle forms of coercion by non-violent means in an attempt to stage manage its role as rooted in the origins of all kinds of Thai cultural practices. Most people then fail to recognise ‘the rules of hierarchy and reciprocity guiding this intricate exercise’ (Van Esterik 1996:33). As a ‘modern’ Buddhist practice, *wai phra kao wat* has become an instrument of the state used to encourage their own policies. They emphasise national sustainability and certain ethical considerations in order to create an ‘imagined’ community. The Thai state exploits the popularity of the practice to further declare other state missions and imply a sense of ‘good’ Thainess in contemporary society. The rhetoric of *kwam sabai jai* (a sense of contentment) from *wai phra kao wat* is converted into a

‘new’ sphere to exercise uncontroversial power. Due to the hybridity of popular Buddhism in Thailand (see chapter 2), the rhetorical element based on Thai folkloric beliefs about *kwam saksit* (efficacy) and *kwam mongkhol* (auspiciousness) of life in *wai phra kao wat*, I argue, encourages ‘new’ boundary to exercise power, both from economic and political perspectives, between Thai governors and the people. The former is regarded as mutual beneficial whereas the latter suggests uncontroversial power.

As an ‘invented’ Buddhist practice, *wai phra kao wat* has commoditised and converted both practice and sphere into a ‘new’ form of tourism that mainly increases economic value for public and private sectors. Meanwhile, the exercising of soft power by Thai governors boosts the domestic economy and strengthens the negotiating power of the state over individuals. The practice is consequently converted into a political instrument to exercise uncontroversial power and to frame Thai perception in terms of Buddhist understandings and national institution’s significance. ‘At least, we are *sabai jai*’ rhetorically generates an emerging role of popular Buddhism as a source of uncontroversial power in contemporary Thai society. It does not address a new cultural commodity but also as a formulating space for ‘good’ Thais in contemporary Thai perception. In a non-secularised society like Thailand, religious institutions still cling to state support. That is to say, the functional existence of popular Buddhism in Thailand still serves state missions in terms of generating uncontroversial power and providing a model of an imagined moral community that satisfies the objectives of the state.



## Chapter 5

### *Wai Phra Kao Wat: A Place of Persuasion in the Conduct of Thai State Authorities*

#### Introduction

Among the drastic changes and political turmoil in recent Thailand, *wai phra kao wat*, a state-sponsored practice, symbolically manifests the ‘imagined’ boundary in which the central Thai state can assimilate discordant elements and convey its policy and justifications at the same time. Although *wai phra kao wat* was initiated long before the recent crisis, the practice has consistently been reissued with new themes and objectives relating to current state missions and policies. It implies that the Thai state attempts to resolve conflicts without violence by revisiting the intrinsic values of Buddhism. As the nature of religion provides a powerful force to unite religious people and to express shared experience, popular Buddhist practices have been exploited to consolidate the Thai nation, especially in times of crisis. King and Parnwell (2011: 396) argued that the orientation of religious tourism directly affects the mental well-beings of the majority of Thais especially in times of difficulties. Regarding *wai phra kao wat*, for example, the military government reorganised the practice as a religious tourism and suggested it as being good for relaxation and enjoyment after the political chaos. However, in accordance with the state-oriented theme, *wai phra kao wat* is applied to convince modern Thais to realise the significance of the three main institutions (nation, religion, and monarchy) of Thai nationalism instigated by King Rama VI. The *wai phra kao wat* accordingly has become a ‘proper’ model of the Buddhist practice through the lens of the government. It provides the state with uncontroversial regime to dominate people without violence during irregular situations. The recognition of the practice is also included as a part of the emerging set of moral criteria of being good Thais in contemporary period.

Although culture is ‘the property of local group and powerless people’ (Durrenberger 1996:2), the Thai state intervenes the people’s property by engaging cultural management. Moreover, the state tries to identify Thai identity by acting as a representative of Thai citizens. Similarly, popular Buddhism in Thailand is exploited for national security because merit activities have potentially blurred the line of social

discrimination or class experience. *Wai phra kao wat* has arguably become an emerging instrument of the recent government to unite social fragments without violence after the recent political chaos. Not only a practice of state-generated economic development, *wai phra kao wat* is also used to emanate subtle power of public authorities via the administration. When *wai phra kao wat* is promoted as an example of ‘good’ Buddhist practices by the modern Thai state, it has been integrated to support a number of current state policies such as ‘Returning happiness to Thai people,’ ‘12 core values,’ ‘*Baworn* policy,’ and ‘*Pracharat*’ policy (the individual policies will be elaborated in the following section). The temples on the official routes have become ‘new’ communicating sphere between the Thai state and its citizens in peaceful mode. The designation of objectives of the practice stresses the state’s optimum demand that is to consolidate modern Thai state with the establishment of the three core institutions.

For instance, ‘*wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn*’ (‘paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of the nine reigns of Chakri kings;’ ไหว้พระ๑วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์๑รัชกาล) proposed by the Ministry of Culture’s Department of Religious Affairs, illustrates the relationship between ‘new’ performances of religiosity in popular Buddhism and rhetorical politics in contemporary Thai society. Without the violence, the state employs values of Buddhism such as the acquisition of meritorious virtue and spiritual satisfaction to create peaceful atmosphere and communicate about the state’s demands. At the same time, the Buddhist practice is employed to convince modern citizens to conform with Thai nationalism subject. State’s behaviours suggest the authoritative force intervenes to conceptualise the notion of ‘Thainess’.

*Wai phra kao wat*, I argue, rhetorically and symbolically represents a new instrument to exercise the power of the modern Thai state. Superficially, the practice exemplifies a mass tourism phenomenon in contemporary Thailand. In fact, its popularity and invocation of touristic innovation with supposed orthodox Buddhist values, have transformed the practice into a place of persuasion in the conduct of the modern Thai state. The state, currently facing a significant crisis of legitimacy, appears both administratively competent as managers of modern touristic practices and morally qualified to promote and defend the traditional national religion. As such they are able to leverage a crucial soft power that permits their communication of current socio-cultural policies, shaping the ‘imagined’ nation and formulating ethical criterion of ‘good’

Thainess. Beyond this, *wai phra kao wat* is presented as a modern ritual able to unite Thai people during a socio-political crisis.

In the following section, I will concentrate on the relationship between *wai phra kao wat* under the theme of ‘*Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn*’ and the state-oriented applications of this practice from a rhetorical perspective. I will explore the state’s presentation of the practice in the media and its applications in the contemporary context.

### Wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn

*Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn* (‘Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of the nine reigns in Chakri dynasty’; ไหว้พระ๑วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์๑รัชกาล) was the official title of the state-oriented *wai phra kao wat* practice in 2016. As the year 2016 marked the auspicious occasion of the seventieth anniversary celebrations of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s accession to the throne and the 84<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary of Queen Sirikit, the government cooperated with private and public organisations <sup>123</sup> to organise *Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn*. The objective of the event was to encourage Thais to ‘appreciate the monarch as the ultimate patron of Buddhism and to demonstrate gratitude to the reign of Chakri dynasty’ (the Ministry of Culture’s Department of Religious Affairs, 2016). This event was initially held on the 31 December 2015 – 3 January 2016 on the occasion of New Year Festival. It was later reorganised a further three times that year, on the occasion of the 234<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Rattanakosin City under Royal Benevolence (20 – 24 April), Visakhabucha day (20 May) and Asalahabucha day (18 – 20 July). For each event the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture was the principal organiser, designated the route destinations <sup>124</sup>, arranging temple activities and providing free air-conditioned bus services. Although the form and route did not vary, *wai phra kao wat* was interpreted with distinctive meanings and roles paralleling to the

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<sup>123</sup> Public and private organisations include the Religious Affair department, the Ministry of Culture, Fine Arts Department, Department of Cultural Promotion, Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, Moral Promotion Center, Film Archives (Public organisation), Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Police, Department of Tourism, The Government, Public Relations Department, The BMTA, and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

<sup>124</sup> The list of the nine royal temples has been already mentioned in chapter 2.

launching period and state policies. Through the lens of the Thai government, the practice is prioritised to support and promote socio-cultural policies. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* identifies the uncontroversial power of modern Thai state to negotiate, contribute, and maintain authoritative power over the laity in period of political polarisation. Simultaneously, it illustrates the *ingenious* character of *wai phra kao wat*, the invented Buddhist practice in the contemporary Thai society. That is to say, the invented and creative characters of *wai phra kao wat* are effectively adapted to generate political commitment without violent threat. The integration of *wai phra kao wat* and a number of current state policies constitutes the varied and complicated interpretation of the Buddhist practice, occupying multiple political objectives as the following:

### *Wai Phra Kao Wat: a government's gift for the people in 2016*

Since the 2014 coup, General Prayuth Chan O-cha has been effective leader of the government, first as head of the junta and currently as Prime Minister. He concentrates on reforming the country under the banner of ‘Stability, Prosperity, and Sustainability’ (*mankhong, mang khang, yang yeun*; มั่นคง, มั่งคั่ง, ยั่งยืน). Religion and cultures are explicitly considered essential features that contribute to achieving the goals of reformation. Due to the mass popularity of modern Buddhist practices, *wai phra kao wat* is reinterpreted to perform new roles in contemporary Thai society. Arguably, the various applications of *wai phra kao wat* by the Thai state signify *ingenious* characters of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thai society.

When the government of General Prayuth Chan O-cha issued the campaign, ‘Returning Happiness to Thai people’ (*keun kwam suk hai kae prachachon*; คืนความสุขให้แก่ประชาชน) during New Year Festival 2015, *wai phra kao wat* was proposed as the government’s gift to the Thai people. In this campaign, the junta government promoted the slogan, ‘a New Year gift from the government instilling “Thainess” in the hearts of the people’ (ของขวัญปีใหม่จากรัฐบาลไทย นำความเป็นไทยสู่ใจประชาชน). On this occasion, they provided ‘free’ welfare services like wellness screenings and immunising vaccinations as well as music concerts, dancing shows, free movie tickets, and street performances. The principal aim of the campaign is to encourage Thais to be relieved from the social and political tensions resulting from the military coup 2014.

Considered as a gift from the state, *wai phra kao wat* rhetorically suggests a reciprocating force between the Thai state and the people. The interpretation as ‘gift’ creates an underlying reciprocity built into the practice. It suggests the practice is an urgent instrument of the recent state to negotiate power and legitimate themselves as ‘good’ leaders. The notion of ‘gift’ can compare with a preceding study on the Thai notion, *liang* (providing food or eating together) by Van Esterik (1996). She depicted *liang* as ‘a metaphor for intimacy and closeness’. The notions of gift and *liang* represent ‘the key to social interaction’. Both actions bolster a wide variety of alternate models of exchange (Van Esterik 1996: 23). When the Thai state employed the notion of gift to characterise the *wai phra kao wat* practice, it simultaneously reinforced the practice with a sense of reciprocity and nurturance. Importantly, the practice reveals the attempt of the recent state to create an intimate connection with the people via Buddhism. The state then engages with the organisation of the religious practice by stressing on its ‘auspicious’ meaning which is an overwhelming desire for the people.

According to Schieffelin (1980), the gesture of gift-giving is rhetorical as the exchanging and transacting actions in this process symbolically contribute socio-cultural meanings to shaping expression and management. The two agents in the gift giving process, giver(s) and recipient(s), also suggest different levels of social relation. Regarding *wai phra kao wat* as a New Year gift, the Thai government arguably employs intimate power to negotiate the state’s demands and satisfaction over the citizen. In terms of the level of relation, the government occupies the superior position of giver, whereas the people are forced to be recipients, seemingly unable to reciprocate in the gift giving process. Many Thai people, however, seem unaware of the hidden force of this practice. They appear satisfied with ‘gifts’ that make them feel better with the junta government’s image. Khun Samruay, a late 40s factory worker in Samutsongkram <sup>125</sup>, explained,

It is good to arrange “free” *wai phra kao wat* for people as we can enjoy travelling together and merit-making without any charges. Otherwise, I would have to stay at home during this long weekend, as I have no budget for this.

The junta government benefits from their self-assumed status as giver in order to be perceived with more acceptance. It is essential for the junta government to establish a

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<sup>125</sup> Interview on 1 January 2016 at Arun Ratchawararam Temple.

new image after committing a coup. Schieffelin (1980) argued gift giving is a suitable vehicle of social obligation and political maneuvering. The interpretation of *wai phra kao wat* from the rhetorical perception of ‘gift’ affects people’s reaction towards the military government. The aim is to alter the stereotypical image of a military coup, thought to be aggressive and immoral, as a softer and more gentle Buddhist regime.

### *The Twelve Core Values: The state-formulated virtues of “good” Thainess*

*Wai phra kao wat* is applied to communicate several state policies especially the twelve core values (*kha niyom sib song prakarn*; ค่านิยม 12 ประการ). It helps to visualise the significance of the strong bonds of the three main institutions (nation, religion, and monarchy) of the strong country and to integrate Thai people in peace and unity. After the 2014 coup, General Prayuth Chan O-cha issued ‘twelve core values’ to contribute to a strong Thailand. The edicts suggest a state-formulated standard of satisfying behaviours contributing to the attainment of a ‘*khon dee*’ (a good person; คนดี) in contemporary Thai society. The twelve core values policy also featured in the reforming campaign ‘Returning Happiness to the Thai people’. It aims to define appropriate characteristics of Thai people through the lens of their leaders. As such, the core values exercise persuasive power over the people to conform to state directives. The formulating characters exhibit a strong sense of Thai nationalism. The twelve core values are:

- (1) Upholding the three main pillars: the nation, the religion, and the monarchy
- (2) Being honest, sacrificial and patient, with a positive attitude for the common good of the public
- (3) Being grateful to the parents, guardians (could also be interested as political leader) and teachers
- (4) Seeking knowledge and education directly and indirectly
- (5) Treasuring cherished Thai traditions
- (6) Maintaining morality, integrity, well-wishes upon others as well as being generous and sharing
- (7) Learning and understanding the true essence of democratic ideals, with His Majesty the King as Head of State
- (8) Maintaining discipline, respectful for laws and the elderly and seniority

(9) Being conscious and mindful of action in line with His Majesty's the King's royal statements

(10) Applying His Majesty the King's sufficiency economy, saving money for times of need, being moderate with surplus for sharing or expansion of business while having good financial security

(11) Maintaining both physical and mental health and unyielding to dark force or desires, having a sense of shame over guilt and sins in accordance with religious principles

(12) Putting the public and national interest before personal interest

In accordance with the 'twelve core values' policy, *wai phra kao wat* is officially organised to encourage the regime of Buddhism as one of the three institutions which is essential to establish Thailand's sustainability. The practice is considered an example of modern Buddhist practice. Additionally, paying respect to religion by participating in Buddhist activities is approved as a component of 'good' *Thainess*. By doing this, the Thai government assigned the Ministry of Culture to facilitate a campaign that reinforced the link between religious activity, mass tourism and social integration. They arranged activities as well as giving information to participants about morality and culture in the nine temples. Arguably, the Thai state exploits the mass popularity of *wai phra kao wat* to reformulate moral standards and cultivate the power of religion over the laity to build credibility for their own 'good' governance.

#### *Baworn Policy: The Collaboration of Community, Temples, and Schools*

In accordance with the *Baworn policy*, *wai phra kao wat* illustrates the sustaining relations of household, temple, and school in Thai society. Literally, *baworn* (บวร) is a mnemonic combined from the three initial Thai letters of the three words 'baan' (house; บ้าน), 'wat' (temple; วัด), and 'rong rean' (school; โรงเรียน). The Ministry of Culture designates the individual roles of the three sectors to work together by using the nine temples area as a structural model for the management of a 'moral community' (*chumchon khunnatham*; ชุมชนคุณธรรม).

The *Baworn* mission aims to promote the collaboration between house, temple and school working altogether to develop communities and expand cooperation

throughout the country. The policy is not directly associated with the practice of *wai phra kao wat*. However, it cannot be denied that *wai phra kao wat* is a good channel to pursue and bond the three main institutions in Thailand to come and work together.

Srinuan Lapkittaro

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The Department of Religious Affairs,  
The Ministry of Culture, Thailand <sup>126</sup>

The interdisciplinary project attempts to contribute to the strong bond of three fundamental institutions in Thai society; house, temple, and school. It aims to pursue social collaboration to finally establish nation sustainability. For example, if any house in a given community requests help, the temple is obligated to assist them. In turn, if the temple requires assistance from school and community, they also have a responsibility to provide help. In accordance with *Baworn* policy, *wai phra kao wat* makes the notion of social collaboration more concrete. For example, in the area of *Wat Rakhang*, there are two schools; a primary school and a high school. It is very common that teachers and students take part in performing on stage and holding activities in the temple on Buddhist days. *Wat Rakhang* always allocates funds for student scholarships <sup>127</sup>. This is an example of the cooperation between house, temple and school according to the *Baworn* policy.

#### *Pracharat Market: Transformation of temple to a new market*

*Pracharat* Policy (state-people policy; นโยบายประชารัฐ) is 76 provincial social enterprises which aim to develop rural economy and improve local entrepreneurship stimulus program called OTOP ('one tambon [meaning sub-district] one product;' โอท็อป) initiatives by collaborating private sector enterprises, community knowledge, and public funding. The main organiser is the National Village and Urban Community Fund Office. The policy of *pracharat* focuses on agricultural processing products and tourism businesses. As a part of this project, *pracharat* markets are set up in different locations in Thailand which aim to provide places for farmers and low-income earners to sell their products. In accordance with this policy, *Chetuphon wimolmangkalaram* temple (*Wat*

<sup>126</sup> Interview on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015

<sup>127</sup> Interview Phra Warapanya Methee at Rakhang Ratchawaramahavihara temple on 4 May 2016.



*Pho*) was once chosen as a *pracharat* market on 18 – 19 July 2016. It is the similar period as the public event of *Wai Phra Kao Wat Seub Sirisawat Kao Ratchakarn* on the occasion of Asalahabucha and Lent day. A number of stalls were set up around the main temple. The organisers arranged areas into two zones; selling OTOP products and showing exhibition about *Pracharat* policy. There was also a central stage for training workshops and seminars from sponsoring organisations<sup>128</sup>. According to this idea, *wai phra kao wat* is rhetorically applied to contribute state power in terms of economic persuasion. The sacred sphere is converted into a marketplace and Buddhists and pilgrims are positioned as consumers in the economic system. However, the combination of temple and market is considered mutual beneficial for both the Thai state and people. They enjoy mass popularity with huge crowds gathered in the site. The combining structure of *wai phra kao wat* accordingly becomes an alternative instrument to generate individual power in contemporary Thai society.



Figure 5.35: Pracharat market at Arun Ratchawararam temple (source: Nattaporn Kaimook)

### *Wai Phra Kao Wat* and the rhetoric of media support

The central importance of mass media to the Thai power elites has been marked for a century by the enthusiastic promotion of new communication technologies and their

<sup>128</sup> Sponsoring organisations of Pracharat Policy consist of National Village and Urban Community Fund Office, Islamic Bank of Thailand, SME Development Bank, Government Savings Bank, and Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives.

extension throughout the countryside. The mass media, it seems, provide an opportunity to extend official ideology rapidly and effectively in a context where the unity of the nation can otherwise only be maintained through coercive administrative and economic measures backed by the use of force. The role of the mass media in the construction of an authorised national identity stems from the need to unify ideologically a population (Hamilton 2002: 279). Consequently, the interweaving of *wai phra kao wat*, the state policies, and the influence of mass media provides the emergence of non-violent instrument of the Thai government that has been employed to handle uncertain situations in the society.

Nowadays, public knowledge of state missions and policies is transmitted or even propagandised through media outlets. Jackson (2016: 836) notes the analysis from the political perspective and the roles of markets and media generate the complete understanding of the increase of new forms of religious expression. The majority of contemporary Thai people are influenced by social media (National Statistical Office, 2015). Social media networks including Facebook, Instagram (IG), and Twitter can be considered an ‘invented’ sphere of modern Thai community that has influence to designate social trends and ‘new’ meanings of practices. They also encourage emerging roles of *wai phra kao wat* as a ‘creative’ Buddhist activity and a ‘trendy’ form of religious tourism in contemporary Thai society. According to the strategy of internet users in Thailand 2015 by National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 88.6 percent of Thai users mostly use the internet to access social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter <sup>129</sup>. The prevalence of these sites is highlighted by the sheer number of users <sup>130</sup>. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram users in Thailand are 41 million (the eighth highest number of Facebook users in the world), 5.3 million, and 7.8 million respectively. The actions of internet users, especially celebrities, significantly influence Thai people and can quickly create new social phenomena. Relating to *wai phra kao wat*, the practice can be considered as a modern form of pilgrimage tourism in Thailand. The invented practice rhetorically creates a ‘contemporary’ sacred sphere and persuades Thai Buddhists and pilgrims to engage with a ‘new’ form of merit. By doing this, participants are explicitly posited as modern pilgrim-tourists who are searching for individual satisfaction. As a form of tourism, *wai phra kao*

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<sup>129</sup> [http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/themes/files/icthh\\_report\\_58.pdf](http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/themes/files/icthh_report_58.pdf) (Accessed online on June 14, 2016)

<sup>130</sup> <https://thothsocial.com/facebook-population-2016/> (Accessed online on May 16, 2016)

*wat* participants are likely to take ‘selfies’<sup>131</sup> and mention “#ไหว้พระเก้าวัด” (*#wai phra kao wat*, “#paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples”) to update their status<sup>132</sup>. It also boosts the trend of practice as a mass tourism in modern Thai life. TAT exploited these social media trends by promoting *wai phra kao wat* as a mass tourism in contemporary Thailand. TAT once promoted campaign ‘*Shae and Share*’<sup>133</sup> during Songkran Festival 13 – 15 April 2016. By doing this, the organisers held activity by designating participants to taking photos while taking part in TAT public events. They also included *wai phra kao wat* by TAT and the Ministry of Culture’s Department of Religious Affairs as the landmark for the photo competition. When pilgrim-tourists took photos at tourist sites and shared photos on Facebook with the hash tag *shae and share* (#แซะแอนด์แชร์), they could win prizes from TAT and co-sponsors<sup>134</sup>.

Although previous governments employed media in promoting the state-sponsored policies, the present government expansively uses it in additive ways. For example, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (ICT) and Ministry of Science and Technology promoted a campaign ‘12 core values’ by launching a collection of cartoon characters in series of ‘Twelve Core Values for Thai’. Thais can download this collection of free stickers from Friend Digital Society’s Official Account in ‘Line’, a mobile application on 30 December 2014 – 28 January 2015. They did this practice on the occasion of New Year Festival 2015 by promoting as a ‘gift’ for Thai people<sup>135</sup>. It means that the Thai state can access the larger number of people that is beneficial for centralising power to sustain the nation. Conversely, the citizens can superficially examine the state’s authority. The power of media then embraces the legitimating power of the Thai state. For *wai phra kao wat*, the success of the practice has also embraced the extension of political regime throughout the country via the influence of mass media. For example, the

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<sup>131</sup> “Selfie” is an action of taking portrait picture with activities and posting it on social media.

<sup>132</sup> According to the statistical data from “#ไหว้พระเก้าวัด” or “#ไหว้พระสวัด” (paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples) on Instagram (IG), a social application on mobile phones, there are 5,626 and 844 public posts respectively. (Accessed on Instagram official account: 2017 October, 18)

<sup>133</sup> The campaign of ‘Shae and Share’ (แซะแอนด์แชร์) combines from two words; ‘Shae’ (แซะ), an imitating sound when capturing a picture and ‘Share’ (แชร์), a borrowing word signifying an approval to show picture in social media.

<sup>134</sup> TAT prizes include holy-threaded bracelets and waterproofed pockets.

<sup>135</sup> ASTV Manager online, [Grand opening for a free-downloading collection of cartoon characters, ‘Twelve Core Values for Thais’ in ‘Line’, a mobile application. It is worth 7.1 million bath for creator.] <http://www.manager.co.th/QOL/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9570000146749> (22 Dec 2014) (Accessed online 15 January 2015)

Thai state mentioned the *wai phra kao wat* practice as a ‘gift’ in a campaign, ‘Returning happiness to Thai people’. Such the interpretation seems to provide an opportunity to the state to monopolise aspects of ‘Thai-ness’ and administrative authorities more rapidly and effectively. According to Hamilton (2002: 279) argues, “the role of the mass media in the construction of an authorised national identity stems from the need to unify ideologically a population”. Consequently, apart from the state administration, the interweaving of *wai phra kao wat*, the state policies, and the influence of mass media provides the emergence of political instrument especially in times of crisis.

Traditional folklore, local customs, and norms have been adapted and transformed into ‘new’ versions of *wai phra kao wat* via media promotion. These features not only respond to drastic changes and emerging roles in society but also strive to preserve their preceding values and identities that are threatened from social and technological advancement. The Ministry of Culture (2015) notes, ‘temples and religious activities involved are considered “social capital” (“*toon thang sangkhom*”; ทูณทางสังคม). It can not only embrace tourist expectation but also motivate local Thais to be proud of themselves and learn to preserve their identities’. The traditional identity of ‘*Thai-ness*’ is grounded on the ultimate reverence of Buddhism, king, and nation related to the inculcation of Thai nationalism. The following chart displays official *wai phra kao wat* events in relation to their sociopolitical context. It demonstrates the adaptability of the practice to various forms and meanings.

*Timeline of public promotions of wai phra kao wat and socio-cultural and political circumstances in Thailand 2014 – 2017*

Social events <sup>136</sup>		Public promotions of <i>wai phra kao wat</i>	
Date(s)	Event(s)	Date (s)	Event (s)
22 May 2014	Gen. Prayuth Chan O-cha establishes effective control as a head of the junta		
11 Jul 2014	The twelve core values were broadcast as part of		

<sup>136</sup> Information about schedules for individual launching policies is based on public broadcast on mass media, particularly the government’s TV programme, “Returning Happiness to Thai people” on Fridays 8.30 –9.30 pm.

	“Returning Happiness to the people” campaign		
21 Aug 2014	Gen. Prayuth Chan O-cha inaugurated as Prime Minister of Thailand		
5 December 2015	<i>Baworn</i> policy (the state policy about the collaboration of ‘house’ (the term signifies residents in the community, temple, and school.		
31 Dec 2015 – 3 Jan 2016	The campaign of New Year’s gift for Thai people was promoted	31 Dec 2015 – 2 Jan 2016	“ <i>Wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn</i> ” (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the prosperous inheritance of the nine <i>Chakri</i> kings) was proposed as a New Year’s gift for Thai people under the campaign “Returning Happiness to Thai people”
29 Jan 2016	The campaign of “ <i>Talad Pracharat</i> ” (the state-people market) was initially promoted.		
22 Feb 2016	Makabucha day	16 –22 Feb 2016	“ <i>Long Reua Chao Phraya Sai Nathee Hang Sattha Im Bun Suk Jai</i> ” (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples: making merit for spiritual purification and mental happiness) (see chapter 3)

21 Apr 2016	The 234 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Rattanakosin City under Royal Benevolence	20 –24 Apr 2016	“ <i>Wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn</i> ” (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the prosperous inheritance of the nine <i>Chakri</i> kings) (see chapter 3 and 5)
20 May 2016	Visakhabucha day	14 –20 May 2016	(1) “ <i>Wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn</i> ” )see chapter 3 and 5( (2) “ <i>Long Reua Chao Phraya Sai Nathee Hang Sattha Im Bun Suk Jai</i> ” (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples: making merit for spiritual purification and mental happiness) (see chapter 3)
19 –20 Jul 2016	Asalahabucha day and Lent day	18 –20 Jul 2016	“ <i>Wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn</i> ” (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the prosperous inheritance of the nine <i>Chakri</i> kings)
13 Oct 2016	His Royal Majesty the King Bhumibhol Adulyadej died		
1 Dec 2016	King Rama X ascends to the throne		
		31 Dec 2016 –2 Jan 2017	“ <i>Wai phra sib wat seub sirisawat sib ratchakarn</i> ”(Paying homage to the ten royal temples)

26 Oct 2017	The funeral cremation ceremony of the late king Rama IX		
		10 –30 Nov 2017	“ <i>Wai phra sib ed wat Rattanakosin</i> ” (Paying homage to the eleven temples in Rattanakosin Island)

The timeline suggests a novel relation between *wai phra kao wat* and socio-political events. Hobsbawm (1983: 3) noted, ‘any social practice that needs to be carried out repeatedly will tend, for convenience and efficiency, to develop a set of conventions and routines’. Since the 2014 coup, *wai pra kao wat* has been reorganised on national holidays, whereas before it was held only on Buddhist holy days. Moreover, the theme of *wai phra kao wat* was reissued as a practice that explicitly supported the institutions of nation, religion, and monarchy. *Wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn* (Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the prosperous inheritance of the nine *Chakri* kings) has been consistently promoted as the state’s annual theme since then. Considered as an invented form of religio-political practice, *wai phra kao wat* provides the way to unite people in Buddhism, the core element of the ‘strong’ nation the current regime aspires to. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* in relation to current sociocultural and political circumstances comprises an attempt of the modern Thai state to establish the sustainability of modern Thailand by stressing cooperative relations of the three institutions. Meanwhile, the practice broadens people’s opportunities to share common religious beliefs and practices and to enjoy themselves during the times of political restriction.

After the death of King Rama IX, ‘*wai phra sib wat seub sirisawat sib ratchakarn*’ (Paying homage to the ten royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of Chakri dynasty; ไหว้พระสิบวัดสืบสิริสวัสดิ์สืบรัชกาล) was reorganised as a New Year Gift for Thai people in 2017<sup>137</sup>. But this time, participants were encouraged to show gratitude for the monarchical lineage of the Chakri dynasty, especially for King Rama IX as he just passed away. Also, the practice celebrated the newly incumbent King Rama X who will be the ultimate patron of Thai Buddhism. By doing this, the Department of Religious Affairs

<sup>137</sup> It was held on 31 December 2016 –2 January 2017.

included a further destination, Wachiradhamma satit temple (วัดวชิรธรรมสาธิต), the appointed royal temple of King Rama X. Similarly, after the funeral cremation ceremony of the late King Rama IX had completed, the BMTA and TAT proposed ‘*wai phra sib ed wat Rattanakosin*’ (Paying homage to the eleven temples in Rattanakosin Island; ไหว้พระสิบเอ็ดวัดรัตนโกสินทร์) as the latest route on 10 – 30 November 2017. They added two more temples on the preceding BMTA’s route (see chapter 2); Ratchabopit sathitmahasimaram temple (วัดราชบพิธสถิตมหาสีมาราม) and Bawornniwet ratchaworavihara temple (วัดบวรนิเวศราชวรวิหาร). The objectives of the practice are not merely to provide free bus services for participants who attempt to visit the eleven temples around Rattanakosin Island. Yet, it is also to facilitate participants who come to attend the exhibition of Royal Cremation Ceremony of king Rama IX at the Royal Grand Field (*Sanam Luang*; สนามหลวง) as the locations of the eleven temples are surrounding the field. Additionally, the two additional temples in this route contain king Rama IX’s royal ashes at the pedestals of the presiding Buddhist images. As a result, people can use the free BMTA service to show reverence for the late king Rama IX at these two temples. The ability to increase prescribed temple destinations in this way provides evidence of just how dynamic the adaptation of *wai phra kao wat* can be to political changes. *Wai phra kao wat* eventually suggests not only the continuity of traditional Buddhism but also the dynamic changes of its performance to the present.

In conclusion, the association of *wai phra kao wat* and the rhetoric of media support emphasises practical roles and adaptability to expose modern connections in which Buddhism adheres to the centre of all social features. In retrospect, the practice provides solutions towards modern Thai demands as well as social crises or loss. *Wai phra kao wat* then becomes a practice in the conduct of state authorities that is ‘cynically’ regulated to attempt to relieve political and social tensions as well as to inculcate ‘proper’ character of ‘*khon dee*’ (a good person) in contemporary Thai society.

#### *A set of criterion of ‘khon dee’ (a good person; คนดี)*

*Wai phra kao wat* becomes a state-oriented symbolic practice of being ‘*khon dee*’ (a good person; คนดี). Being ‘good’ Thais is a serious concern in the modern Thai state. Unsurprisingly, the practice of *wai phra kao wat* has not gone unaffected from the current regime’s preoccupation with morality. Morris (2000:147) argues that the appearance or performance of the “ideal” Thainess is so prioritised that the Thai state attempts to



designate “the criterion of proper citizenship”. Although it is difficult to define the exact meaning of ‘good Thainess,’ official organisers have endorsed the *wai phra kao wat* practice as a practical technique, an almost mechanical strategy for producing ‘*khon dee*’ (‘good people’; คนดี) based on the state’s view. *Wai phra kao wat* is part of rhetoric that has been employed to communicate and symbolically determine the ‘appropriate’ code of conduct for ‘*khon dee*’. Of prime importance to the current military regime, is the moral value of submission to authority, as can be seen in the 12 core Thai values campaign that was launched shortly after the coup of 2014. This campaign noted that ‘good’ citizens are the most influential factor to contribute a strong nation. The idea of this campaign parallels to Cohn (1983: 173) as he argues, the contributions to the integrity in many states become highly concerned about the creation and representation of culture and code of conduct. In Thailand, moral principles and ethical virtues are mostly grounded in Buddhist philosophy and ideology, with good and bad deeds structured by the logic of merit and demerit (‘*boon lae bab*,’ บุญและบาป). The justification of being ‘good’ Thais, as a result, must appear to closely adhere to Buddhist norms and traditions. Thai authorities are keen to employ the significance of Buddhism and cultural roots to frame the ‘good’ citizens of Thailand. It is believed that religion and culture are able to secure the stronghold of modern Thai nation by creating a coherent political consensus during a time of deep political divide. Moreover, a seemingly politically-neutral, mass religious event has the effect of papering-over socio-political conflicts. Consequently, *wai phra kao wat*, a state-promoted practice, provides the spatial embodiment to communicate and emphasise the state-oriented criterion of ‘*khon dee*’.

‘*Khon dee mee silatham*’ (a virtuous person; คนดีมีศีลธรรม) is a trope that suggests the satisfying character of moral Thais from the state’s perspective. Policies and missions of the modern Thai state have been addressed the expectation to contribute young Thais who have moral virtues as they assume that virtues and moral can create social consolidation and prosperity of the nation. As the Thai state provokes ethical consideration as a serious concern in modernity, the public authorities respond the central state by designating the ethical criterion of being good Thais as the official policies such as the 12 core values and Baworn policy. They formulate moral disciplines to develop the nation and encourage homogeneous citizens. The new criterion of ‘*khon dee*’ is composed of the dual elements of the residual ‘tradition’ and the emerging ‘modernity’. Traditional interpretations of Buddhism tend to emphasise collective values of national solidarity and

loyalty to central political structures (Jackson 2002: 160). The two opposing ideas of traditional Buddhism and modern tourism along with the monarchical theme in *wai phra kao wat* have been engaged to embrace the concept of ‘imagined’ moral community, and the anticipated image of the state. Although the central Thai authority works hard on social problems concerning immorality and unethical issues, these problems seem to be unresolved and sometimes tend to be worse. Religious institutions that are generally considered healing centres of moral and spiritual difficulties are employed to overcome chaotic situations. Nevertheless, being ‘*khon dee*’ is often coterminous with religiosity. The Buddhist way is a state-prioritised policy aiming to develop a moral Thai community. For example, *wai phra kao wat* symbolically provides the Thai regime of image of ‘*khon dee*’ (a good person). The ministers, bureaucrats, and elite people are publicised as participating *wai phra kao wat*. The practice authorised by the Thai state suggests the religious conducts can satisfy the Thai state in modern Thai perception.

Religious performances and activities play a role to illustrate philosophical ideas for ordinary people in accessible ways. *Wai phra kao wat* reflects a “proper” manner of being good Buddhist in contemporary Thailand. A metaphysical view of Buddhist doctrine emphasises the determining influence of kamma and religious merit and demerit on human well-being and socioeconomic status (Jackson 2002: 159). The practice is a social expression that the state encourages as a stage of being good Thais by fundraising the practice as well as promoting practice not only for Buddhists but also for all Thais in the modern Thai nation. Owing to ethical consideration and morality being a primary concern, *wai phra kao wat* provides the ‘imagined’ moral landscape to communicate the significance of moral and virtues in modern social life.

#### *(Re-) image of modern leadership*

The term ‘image’ applied in this study translates from the Thai expression, ‘*phap lak*’ (ภาพลักษณ์) which denotes the “good” image or reputation of an institution (like the Thai monarchy), an organisation (like the government) or an individual (like the leader) particularly presented in public domain (satarana; สาทรรณะ). In this section, I will discuss how *wai phra kao wat* encourages the “positive” image of the modern Thai leadership. I argue that *wai phra kao wat* as a state-sponsored Buddhist practice plays a part to encourage the “moral” public image of the recent leader which implicitly signifies the

contradictory image of the previous military government in Thai political history. In the history of Thai nationalism, it might not be novel that cultural identity has been used to contribute to the leader's image. The symbolic character of the leader as a religious person has been continuously employed since former military governments. Por Phibulsongkram proposed 'Rattaniyom' ('state convention;' รัฐนิยม) in 1939 – 1942 and 'kha niyom laksana tee pueng prasong' ('the values of satisfying characters;' ค่านิยมลักษณะนิสัยที่พึงประสงค์) in 1951 to determine 'satisfactory' characters of Thais by adding norms and ethical values in the policy. In case of Gen Prayuth government, it is the policy of the twelve core values which are reinterpreted to the practical semi-religion activity as *wai phra kao wat* and promoted it by employing rhetorical techniques to pursue people as a gift and free activity on Buddhist holidays and special monarchical occasions.

In Thailand, image has become a distinctive concern in modes of relationship and recognition. It influentially affects Thai feelings of either 'love' or 'hatred' which then contributes social actions of either 'respect' or 'reprimand'. Jackson (2004:186) argued,

In modern Thai usage, “images” are “built” and “constructed”. They can be “enhanced” and “promoted” and they are at risk of being “damaged” or even “destroyed”. These expressions draw on and develop older notions of “face” (na) and “reputation,” and reflect a pervasive cultural concern with “constructing positive image and avoiding damage to reputation”.

The contribution of 'good' image of the Thai leader not only creates social impression and credibility from the public but also suppresses the intimate origin of the agent. Most of Thais will judge from the appearance before building the relationship. Van Esterik (2000:4) argues, 'Thailand is a society that encourages an essentialism of appearances or surfaces. ... The real is hidden and unchallenged. The surface is taken for real'. In accordance with the coming of the recent leader, it reflects that they highly attempt to exploit uncontroversial power to bond the relationship and to establish the legitimacy to the contemporary Thai society. Mulder (1985:143-144) interestingly notes,

Thai society is a presentational society, emphasising formality, conformity, belief in ceremony, while easily taking presentation to be the heart of things”.

...

This appreciation of presentation as the essence of reality describes the phenomenon in which outside appearance is taken to be the essence of social life. It is the manipulation of form as content, or the equation of these two, in the sense that they are understood and taken as being one and the same thing. ... It is [the] pronounced tendency to take the surface of things for their essence that may be called 'deep seated satisfaction with presentation.' The depth of this satisfaction is demonstrated by the emotion that is invested in presentation. Presentation is therefore more than superficial reality: it is essential reality; this mental recognition is at the basis of the tendency to equate the manipulation of the symbols of social reality with its actual mastery."

(Mulder 1985:198-199)

From this viewpoint, the public image of leaders and public figures becomes highly concerned because they are more likely to attract public attention in which directly affects the state legitimacy. As a result, the Thai state exploits the long-lasting and seemingly neutral Buddhism by fundraising and promoting Buddhist practices such as *wai phra kao wat* in form of a 'present'. The close relationship between Buddhism and the historical continuity of the modern Thai state provides a high degree of mutual benefits to religio-cultural activities as the identity of Thainess (Jackson 2002: 157). As the primacy of Buddhism is intertwined into all parts of Thai life, the art of negotiation between the leader and citizens by mentioning Buddhist ideology and doctrines is likely to be effective and acceptable. The administration of the Thai state has long been characterised by a patronage system. In this system, fundraising or sponsoring Buddhist activities can dramatically improve the positive image of a public figure. In case of *wai phra kao wat*, the state-sponsored activity promoted as 'gift' or free activity plays a part in altering citizen's perceptions towards the military government and, by extension, the leader. Nevertheless, 'the intention of "giving a gift" is rather keep people in debt to the government and insure that the elements of control are widely understood, using a symbolic code intimately understood by the Thai public' noted by Van Esterik (1996: 35). The leadership style of Gen Prayuth Chan O-cha follows an autocratic character (Krittaya 2015). Nevertheless, he is often ridiculed for his idiosyncratic speech and personal styles. Then, being host of *wai phra kao wat* by the government and the ministers is made explicit to bolster the moral leadership in Thai perception. Similarly, the state

sponsored Buddhism make the leader's image more specialised by redefining the practice as a gift in which also reimages the state as the 'generous' giver based on Thai people (as receivers)'s perception. *Wai phra kao wat* is partially applied to reinforce the "moral" image of the leader after the political chaos. At the same time, it provides the negotiating sphere for the state-oriented commitment between the leader and its people.

The majority of Thais are more likely to show bias for the state leaders and politicians in terms of a cause of social problems. As a result Buddhist organisations are looked upon to solve perceived spiritual and moral crises of the state. Leaders, for their part, are seen to be responsible to not only be good examples but also the principal sponsors of religious institutions. Such the ideas aim to improve the preceding bias of the citizens and renegotiate the state demands at the core institution of Thai nation. Accordingly, the emergence of recent government seems to have modified the norms of good leadership in the contemporary society.

## Conclusion

*Wai phra kao wat* is symbolically converted into an 'imagined' boundary of persuasion in the conduct of the recent political administration. The practice may be an effective strategy for recovering the public image and 'moral' credibility of the leaders facing crises of legitimacy. State patronage of Buddhism affects the positive public image of the leader. With the practice promoted as a free public event, it provides the state with an opportunity to approach and communicate with their citizens about the urgent state missions. The more intimacy between the state and citizen as well as the effective cooperation of the three institutions will be anticipated from the peaceful manner of the leader. Again, the transmission of *wai phra kao wat* towards the socio-political aspect signifies 'new' applications of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thailand. The dynamic practice effectively responds to satisfy both people and state in accordance with individual missions. The high degree of public intervention allows boosting "new" values on the ground of Thai nationalism. *Wai phra kao wat*, recently, no longer serves narrowly personal religio-cultural purposes. Rather, it reformulates and exposes in more complicated structures of contemporary Thai society such as the power regime and the socio-political revival of the modern Thai nation.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

*Wai phra kao wat* represents a social phenomenon in contemporary Thailand. The practice shows the effective adaptation and continuity of popular Buddhism relating to drastic changes of socioeconomic and political circumstances. Most of the scholars have not noticed how *wai phra kao wat* works. Nevertheless, *wai phra kao wat* mobilises both habits of commerce and of ritual to achieve its extraordinary impact in contemporary society. The intertwining features including structure, forms of activities, objectives, and applications are dynamic and able to be performed by any sector of modern society. As a contemporary social practice, the programme incorporates apparently contradictory elements. It exhibits creativity in adapting popular practices of Buddhism to the modern era. Yet, it retains a deeply conservative ideology that has been the cornerstone of official nationalism since the reign of king Rama VI. Additionally, *wai phra kao wat* generates a new negotiating boundary for diverse oppositions: scriptural and popular Buddhism, traditional and invented tradition, or even public and individual practices. By combining two practices that would otherwise seem incompatible, namely pilgrimage and tourism, participants are made more comfortable as they participate in the practice. The practice then expands its popularity as a non-violent mass activity. The trope of *wai phra kao wat* is omnipresent in modern narration, retelling of Buddhist virtues, or even political metaphors, so that is sometimes difficult to see how new it is, considered in light of either morality or formation of the practice.

*Wai phra kao wat* reflects dual patterns of significant changes of socially-engaged Buddhism in contemporary Thailand; the hybrid structure and the politico-economic relation. On one hand, the re-enchantment of religiosity and ritual combine to render Buddhism practical in the contemporary context. On the other hand, this re-enchantment contributes to the contemporary socio-political hierarchy. Popular Buddhism, capitalism and political influences are interwoven into a new line of relationship in which parallels to the triumvirate of nationalism ideology; nation, religion, and monarchy. Popular Buddhism is able to generate income from commodified ritual while it offers a new source of political regime among the conditional social situation. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* obviously presents the reshaping process of Buddhism in order to bolster the existence and feasibility of Buddhism in contemporary Thailand. Following this, I will present the

contribution of the *wai phra kao wat* study from four viewpoints: religious, economic, political, and ethical perspectives.

### *Wai phra kao wat: the hybridisation of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thailand*

Hybridisation of religions in mainstream Buddhism has made explicitly from prosperity-oriented activities in monasteries that include *wai phra kao wat*. The cultivation of religious deities, spiritual cults, and even traditional folk beliefs formulates the source of merit in which Buddhists and worshippers show preference and gratitude for the ‘sacred’ Buddhism and supernatural quality. The complex background of Buddhism interwoven with these ‘hybrid’ elements plays a significant role arousing the mass popularity of *wai phra kao wat*. It also embraces the practice as a tool for profit-making exercise. Some scholars (Phra Visalo 2004: 45 – 49; Sulak 1980) argue that Buddhism has been threatened by merit-making practices involving materialism and occult power, which they view as failing to be significantly Buddhist in the age of capitalism which then fails the recognition of Buddhist significance in the contemporary Thai society. Nevertheless, the new formula of the *wai phra kao wat* practice plays a part to keep Thai Buddhism alive. *Wai phra kao wat* reflects a consistent increase of interest in meritorious power and magic involving this-worldly human needs. The construed meanings of temples’ names together with activities are related to support worldly affairs regarding wealth and health. The hybrid elements of *wai phra kao wat* give rise to a new channel for communication in which all Thais are able to gain individual satisfaction. Arguably, the dilemma of the ‘hybrid’ Buddhism can be productive of novel economic and sociocultural expression.

Sacred manifestation in the context of capitalism has distinctively aroused public interest to invest money on various forms of Buddhist services and commodity including *wai phra kao wat*. Cook (2012: 43) argues that ‘the most distinctive difference in patterns of religiosity in the contemporary context is the proliferation of the materialization of the sacred, their promotion through media and their accessibility to the Thai population at large’. The fertility of activities in the nine temples as well as the various forms of *wai phra kao wat* in modern businesses raises the sacred quality to rationalise meritorious ground and Buddhist significance in contemporary period. When *wai phra kao wat* has been construed by associating with modern economic system, it has been proposed as an

alternative source of profit in the capitalist market. Once *wai phra kao wat* becomes a trendy activity, it was immediately engaged to facilitate commercial values. The practice is pursued as a form of creative economy.

### *Wai phra kao wat: a model of creative economy in contemporary Thailand*

Due to the overwhelming impact of late capitalism in Thailand, economic and business growth are prioritised as the driving force to develop the whole country. In recent years, the creative economy has been lauded as a fertile source of economic power in the modern context. Howkins (2001) argues that the creative economy attempts to inspire creativity and innovation for increasing values and profit in the future market. As a result, all kinds of social activities in contemporary Thai society are purposed to generate income as either forms of business or industry. *Wai phra kao wat* is similarly considered a significant source of financial capital via the processes of (re-) invention and transformation. Although the relations between religion and money have provoked controversy, the commodification of Buddhism appears to be consistently flourishing and generating a massive income. Pattana (2006: 269) argues the dispersal of religious commodities have filled in the religious market in the commercialisation of Thai Buddhism. It is possibly because the capitalist market itself with logics of competition provokes the mental fatigue and social struggles that religious practices like *wai phra kao wat* purports to relieve. Sacredness and superstition bridge the gap produced by science and technology, thus becoming prosperous and pervasive spiritual solutions to the secularising forces of modern society. The ‘inventing’ religious practices by relating to superstitious feature are striking for most entrepreneurs in terms of credibility and profitability. The recent forms of religious practices have been transformed and developed into commodities of modern businesses. From the economic perspective, *wai phra kao wat* will be analysed as an ‘emerging’ source of cultural capital in the modern economy that is known to ‘creative economy.’ I will provide the descriptions from the applications of *wai phra kao wat* as features of the two industries: tourism and film industries (see details in chapter 3).

The creative economy prioritises human imagination and ingenuity as a creative strategy to add value and increase profit (Howkins, 2001). Arts, culture, design, entertainment, media and innovation are considered the principal sources of the creative



economy. In Thailand, the creative economy played a particularly crucial role in accruing GDP growth during 2002 – 2009 <sup>138</sup>. The National Economic and Social Development Board (2011) promoted the creative economy and adapted it to the Thai social context. They state that the creative economy in Thailand is,

The economic development which is from contribution and application of knowledge, creativity, and intellectual property. These sources are associated with cultural knowledge, accumulative knowledge of local communities, technology and innovation to increase values in “new” products and services <sup>139</sup>.

Thailand wishes to be the creative industrial hub of the ASEAN region, aiming to increase the proportion of GDP from this sector. Thailand’s creative industries have been growing steadily accounting for 13 percent of total GDP in 2014 <sup>140</sup>. Creative industries in Thailand involve cultural heritage and nature, arts, media, and functional creation (TCDC 2009). The expected income leads to frame the new policy of cultural administration. The most important feature of creative economy in Thailand is ‘cultural capital’ (*thoon thang watthanatham*; ทูณทางวัฒนธรรม) involving intellectual properties. Intellectual properties that have been cultivated from generation to generation remain valuable and identifiable. They are then suitable for continuing development in the modern context.

According to the Cultural Master Plan (2007 – 2017) by the Ministry of Culture, the sixth strategy addressed ‘cultural capital’ (*thoon thang watthanatham*; ทูณทางวัฒนธรรม) to bolster the creative economy of Thailand. Cultural capital in the Thai definition includes tangible and intangible forms<sup>141</sup> such as traditions, customs, folkloric beliefs and

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<sup>138</sup> Cited in [http://www.nesdb.go.th/ewt\\_w3c/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=2774](http://www.nesdb.go.th/ewt_w3c/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=2774) (The national economic and development board of Thailand, 28 March 2011)

<sup>139</sup>“ การพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจบนพื้นฐานของการสร้างและใช้องค์ความรู้ ความคิดสร้างสรรค์ และทรัพย์สินทางปัญญา ที่เชื่อมโยงกับพื้นฐานทางวัฒนธรรม การส่งเสริมความรู้ของสังคม เทคโนโลยี และนวัตกรรม ในการผลิตสินค้าและบริการใหม่ เพื่อสร้างมูลค่าเพิ่มทางเศรษฐกิจ ”(The National Economic and Social Development, 2011)

<sup>140</sup> Thailand Creative & Design Centre (TCDC) officially published data on creative industry GDP is available up to 2014. Ref: *TCDC Outlook: Creative Economic prospects (Jul – Dec 2017)*, <https://web.tcdc.or.th/en/Publication/Detail/TCDC-Outlook-EN-Jul-Dec2017> (accessed online: 6 November 2017)

<sup>141</sup> Tangible resources of cultural capital consist of Thai traditional costumes, herbs, technology, mythical texts, legends, and Thai food whereas intangible sources include folkloric beliefs, religions, attitude (The National Economic and Social Development, 2011)

local knowledge is distinctive and fertile in Thai society. The Ministry of Culture is mainly responsible for fundraising and developing “cultural capital” in order to bolster the achievement of the creative economy. Hobsbawm (1983:264) argued, ‘civil society and the state within which it operated become increasingly inseparable’. Cultural capital in this sense, I argue, takes a functional role in the Thai political economy. The modern Thai state influentially strives to set a new code of contemporary culture, therefore transforming a flexible practice into a formal discipline. That is to say, a ‘new’ adaptive role of invented culture is fundamentally emerged to directly embrace the state missions and policies.

Since Thailand is fertile with traditions and cultures, they have been converted to support economic growth. The uniqueness and identity of these individual traditions are intended to be made attractive to outsiders, thereby increasing their value in the social market. I argue that the *wai phra kao wat* practice, an intangible source of capital in the cultural industry, is a successful model of cultural capital in contemporary Thailand. *Wai phra kao wat* crosses over from a mere semi-religious practice to the new modes of the culture industry. Tourism and film industries are determined to clarify this viewpoint. At the end of this section, *wai phra kao wat* will be investigated as part of the ongoing policy ‘Thailand Brand’, the economic policy that strives to create the ‘adding value’ from the basic term of ‘Thainess’ in the modern Thai economy.

The widespread recognition of *wai phra kao wat* has seen the practice become a source of revenue for private film and tourist companies. Jackson (2016: 837) argues that ‘mediatization refers to processes in which the mass media and social networks spread the reputation of deities and create an aura of sacredness’. The adaptation of the *wai phra kao wat* practice into visual media illuminates the attempt to preserve and simultaneously develop Buddhism and culture that is increasingly challenged in the modern context (Siraporn 2016:155). The main targets are children and teenagers. Due to the formulation of an online game (see in chapter 2), for instance, children can enjoy themselves and learn about *wai phra kao wat* as a new form of Buddhist practice. When most vibrant symbolic characters originated from popular Buddhism, *wai phra kao wat* was previously recognised as a meritorious practice which has now been transformed into the two alternative forms of modern leisure activities: film and tourism.

Beyond this, the Thai state eagerly promotes practices like *wai phra kao wat* as part of the ongoing construction of ‘brand Thailand’. The diversity of cultures and services are prioritised as important sources of socioeconomic capital. Thai cultural

heritage and a notion of ‘*Thai-ness*’ (*kwam pen thai*; ความเป็นไทย) convey Thai identity as an influential social force that ‘adds value’ (*moonlaka perm*; มูลค่าเพิ่ม) to the modern economic system (The Department of Religious Affair 2014:5). Nation-branding is defined as ‘the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences’ (Dinnie 2008:15). It is a relatively new phenomenon because the growth of global competition influences nations to imbue themselves with a sense of uniqueness and identity in order to increase touristic interest, domestic investment, and international exports (Dinnie 2008:17). In the Thai case, nation-branding is focused on Buddhism and related cultural themes as ‘*Thai-ness*’. Religious tourism, then, has become the integral part of ‘brand Thailand’ because it attracts a large number of pilgrim-tourists throughout the world to visit Thailand with its harmonious blend of historical and beautiful temples, traditional Buddhist lifestyle, and civilised activity. The Religious Affairs department organised a project to ‘promoting pilgrimage tourism from a Buddhist perspective <sup>142</sup>’ which aimed to encourage domestic tourism, the most important source of national income, by promote alternative forms of tourism such as “religious tourism” or “spiritual tourism.” The route of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok, a state-sponsored practice, was recommended in this project as the main destination of Thailand.

The development of *wai phra kao wat* is congruent with the economic and cultural policies proposed by TAT and the Ministry of Culture. Moreover, the cultivation of *wai phra kao wat* in forms of popular culture such as tourism, film, and online game objectifies the religious practice in a form of religious commodity. Although the transformation of *wai phra kao wat* is regarded by some as superficial and inappropriate, the practice has become recognised as a model of religious tourism. Meanwhile, media industry highlights sacred implication of *wai phra kao wat* in promotion. The expansive interpretations of the sacred quality not only serve economic policies of the Thai state but also reflects changing characters of Buddhism relevant such as from ‘sacred’ temple to ‘modern’ market and from ‘renouncing’ monks to the ‘managerial’ responsibility. Temples employ marketing strategies to designate the various forms of the practice for serving worldly satisfaction. The variety of Buddhist activities becomes optional to serve individual purposes. The corporate business applications of *wai phra kao wat* emphasise

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<sup>142</sup> “โครงการส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเส้นทางแสวงบุญในมิติทางศาสนา” (*klong karn song serm kan thongthiew sen tang sa waeng boon nai miti tang satsana*)

the close connection between religion and money. The dynamic changes of Thai Buddhism have been branched out to bolster the capitalist context.

Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* is a source of ‘modern’ economic power. Buddhism and culture, the two main components, constitute ‘cultural capital’ in the new economic system and evolves a ‘hybrid’ enterprise from both private and public sectors. When the growth of a cultural industry plays a crucial factor in generating national income, some particular aspects of cultures become festishized for contributing ‘new’ power in mode of business enterprise. Mass popularity also boosts the awareness of cultural profitability in the new market system. As a result, the growth of cultural trends targeted to a domestic audience, like *wai phra kao wat* becomes lauded as shaping not only the economic sustainability of the nation but also its identity. The dynamic applications of *wai phra kao wat* provide new religio-cultural value that is highly effective to compete on the modernised stage. At the same time, *wai phra kao wat* reflects a spatial movement on the basis of economic exploitation. That is, modern temples become a sacred boundary as well as a tourist attraction. The temples’ boundaries are converted into a commoditising landscape. Again, *wai phra kao wat* illustrates the capitalist impact towards religio-cultural practices in modern Thai economy.

### *Wai phra kao wat: the emergence of the rhetorical instrument in the conduct of Thai state authorities*

*Wai phra kao wat* becomes a rhetorical instrument of the current government. It provides the peaceful negotiating boundary in the immediate situation. The interpretation of state welfare and sponsorship of the practice helps to relieve political tension and to disguise the inequality of the society. Symbolic characters in particular are engaged to bolster sociopolitical changes. For example, the construed meaning of the title and the objectives of the practice present how the recent state associates Buddhism into its exercising power. The establishment of Buddhism as a main institution of Thailand affects ways of thinking and ethical criterion of Thais in majority. The state sought out mutual benefits by engaging the *wai phra kao wat* practice with its current policies such as ‘Returning *Kwam Suk* to Thai people’, ‘The Twelve Core Values’, ‘*Baworn* policy’, and ‘*Pracharat* policy’. Temples are used as information centres for these policies. The organisers set up exhibitions to inform participants about state policies. At the same time,

the promotion of free services and facilities in the *wai phra kao wat* campaign are described as state welfare. The exploitation of *wai phra kao wat* generates a channel to communicate about the state affiliations. Simultaneously, it implicitly inculcates moral dispositions and attitudes of Thais on the basis of Buddhist doctrines. The state sponsorship of *wai phra kao wat* not only provokes the coexistence of Buddhism in contemporary Thai society but also bolsters positive image of the government as the main sponsor. *Wai phra kao wat* finally represents Buddhist legitimacy in contemporary Thailand that is supposed to be the innovative authority. Its authority is able to variegate the modern connection of Thai social system occupying state, religion, and money in order to gain mutual benefits altogether.

The interweaving characters of *wai phra kao wat* employ rhetorical strategies to create ‘symbolic meanings’ into individual elements of the practice, from their titles to the ritual actions which promise an auspicious result. For example, the constituent words of its title rhetorically link the religious (‘*wai phra*’; ‘paying homage to the Buddha’; ไหว้พระ, and ‘*wat*’; ‘temple’; วัด) and auspicious orientation of the practice (‘*kao*’; ‘nine’; เก้า). The names of each temple on the original TAT route signify ‘a formula of auspicious future’. Other features and activities such as donating chairs and mats in return for a comfortable life and donating construction materials for good housing and a warm family also signify meanings that derive from miscellaneous sources like daily routines and commoditising strategies. The symbolic characters of *wai phra kao wat* affect mindset, thinking process, classification, and interpretation. For example, the symbol of number nine is ubiquitously employed in most of social activities in contemporary Thai society. Apart from symbolising the king Rama IX, this numerical figure reflects a new norm of superstition when modern Thais deal with uncertainty. It can be said that Thais value rhetorical power to predominate actions and performances. So, the ‘construed’ symbolic characters have been developed to concretise the symbolic features in scriptural Buddhism that have often been regarded as old-fashioned and unpopular with the younger generation. Consequently, the rhetorical strategies in creating ‘meaningful’ *wai phra kao wat* play a role in wider recognition and accessibility of Buddhism in modern days.

### *Wai phra kao wat: the habitus of modern Thais*

I argue that the intrinsic characters of *wai phra kao wat* effectively respond to the ‘tastes and preferences’ of modern Thais. Habitus determines a system of dispositions that is first inculcated independently during childhood. After that, individual habits are reinforced by institutions or particular groups endowed with similar dispositions that are known to ‘tastes and preferences’ (Kupari 2016:20). Bourdieu (1994) argues that habitus concentrates on social expression and manner as the reflection of inner perception and disposition. Accordingly, *wai phra kao wat* reflects the habitus of modern Thais because it is distributed as a mass practice throughout society. I will investigate the modern Thais’ habitus from its constituent features as well as utterances about *wai phra kao wat*.

When the recent military regime attempted to alleviate the national insecurity occurring from the recent political turmoil, they urged Thais to unite under the triumvirate of nation, religion, and monarchy. For instance, ‘*wai phra kao wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn*’ (‘Paying homage to the Buddha at the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of the nine reigns in *Chakri* dynasty’; ไหว้พระ๑วัด สืบสิริสวัสดิ์๑รัชกาล), a state-sponsored practice, reflects a perceived ‘good’ Thai characteristic via the lens of the modern Thai state (see details in chapter 5). The practice also illustrates the new role of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thailand. It has been granted for the ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas’ (Turner 1969) in which seems to be less controversial for communicating between the state representatives and Thai citizens during the irregular period. Thai state has taken pride from its roots including Buddhist norms, rituals, cultures, and traditions to inculcate how to be ‘good’ Thais. According to the state’s policies such as the 12 core values and *baworn* policy, being ‘religious’ is identified as a characteristic of ‘good’ Thais. Similarly, *wai phra kao wat* has become the ‘approved’ values of ‘good’ Thainess because the practice has been chosen as a state-oriented model of Buddhist practice in modern Thailand. Consequently, participating in *wai phra kao wat* figuratively provides an opportunity to show reverence to the monarchy and Buddhism. The symbolic practice has become a persuasive character of ‘good’ Thais via the lens of the modern Thai state.

Moreover, *wai phra kao wat* has become a new solution for vicissitudes of modern Thais. The recognition of the practice discloses an intrinsic character of most Thai that is lack of self-confidence. Simultaneously, it can imply that the Thai state as well as social situations are unable to ensure the quality of life of most Thais. So, it is necessary to find alternative solutions to deal with the uncertainty. The ubiquity of ‘sacred’ model figures

and religious activities by relating to the historical or legendary presence engaging the foundation of monasteries or even ‘construed’ auspicious meanings rhetorically motivates the engagement of participants (see chapter 3). Buddhist cognition seems to be inconsistent with ‘Buddhist’ actions in contemporary Thai context (see chapter 4). That is to say, most of Thai Buddhists esteem the Buddha whereas they enthusiastically invest in Buddhist practices and objectification for the sacredness and superstitions. Paralleling to this, Buddhism is always the matter for Thais. For example, Thai state seeks to legitimate the religions into Thai’s life. It is evident that Thai state determines Thai citizens to identify their religions in the identification cards. The religious information in the identification cards illustrates how religious persons become essential in Thai society. As a result, when the majority of Thai people, who do not have any specific beliefs or participate the Buddhist activities for any reasons, have to identify their religions in the identification cards, Buddhism is always predominantly identified. According to the hybridity of popular Buddhism in Thailand, *wai phra kao wat* illustrates the integration of Buddhist-oriented, semi-Buddhist-oriented, and local-oriented religious practice effectively responds modern Thais’ impression. The combination of auspicious-oriented appearance of popular Buddhism and touristic pleasure has aroused modern Thais to partake in the *wai phra kao wat* practice without reluctance. As a result, the success of *wai phra kao wat* lies in its perceived ability to instruct the modern Thai laity towards understanding the actions required of Buddhists in a contemporary context rather than the essences in the doctrinal Buddhism. Thai thoughts and ways of life are mostly shaped on the basis of the proliferation of religio-cultural knowledge. Buddhist philosophies and local wisdom in particular have been linked to the logics of decision-making and behaviours of Thais. The public preference of *wai phra kao wat* should thus be considered a crucial factor determining the adaptation of popular Buddhism. It will probably reinforce the identity of Buddhism in the future of Thailand.

When *wai phra kao wat* is considered as a mass religio-cultural practice, it is used to validate Buddhist identities and values in contemporary Thailand. *Wai phra kao wat* is rhetorically interpreted as external power to bestow greater quality of life. Social interpretations exemplifying from three utterances about *wai phra kao wat* below present mass popularity of the practice gives rise to the distinctiveness of religiosity characters and meritorious force over the perceived ability of popular Buddhism. Rhetorically, the term ‘*wai phra kao wat*’ has become a figurative expression to exaggerate substantial power of Buddhism. This figurative speech possibly misleads Thais about moral

justification. Moreover, such the interpretation links to serious concerns about the future of Buddhism and modern Thainess.

Some people think that eat anything as you wish! Starting exercise you can do tomorrow. You know, when you do a bad deed, it cannot solve with the good one. *Likewise, metaphorically, if you have an affair, going for “tamboon kao wat”* (make merit at nine temples) **does not make any sense**”.

(Interviewed Kalamare, ‘A Day’ Bulletin on 3 October 2015)

The narrator aimed to illustrate the significance of physical exercise by comparing to a cultural-based metaphor. “*Tam boon kao wat*” (‘making merit at the nine temples;’ ทำบุญเก้าวัด) in this statement signified the perceived ability in which the practice can provide ‘substantial’ merit. Additionally, it implied the way in which modern Thais are likely to misunderstand about kammic notion. That is to say, most of them misinterpreted the meritorious virtues by saying, “doing ‘good’ deeds at present is possible to compensate previous ‘bad’ ones”. Such the understanding appears to be dangerous for the nation’s development as self-development and self-discipline of modern Thais may be stunted in such a belief.

The second utterance translated from a Thai poem entitled ‘Why do we go for wai phra kao wat?’ (*wai phra kao wat peua a rai*; ‘ไหว้พระเก้าวัดเพื่ออะไร’) said,

Why do we go for *wai phra kao wat* (‘paying homage to the Buddha at the nine temples;’ ไหว้พระเก้าวัด)? Who organises the ‘Buddhist’ practice as if it is a competition? Ironically, no one cares for the Buddha’s teachings; instead, ‘Buddhists’ strive to ask for prosperity from the Buddha. Flowers and venerating objects are always well prepared. A dense smoke from incense sticks and candles covers the temple’s area whereas some temples also allow to light firecrackers. *Going for ‘kao wat’ (‘nine temples;’ เก้าวัด) or more cannot deal with ‘ki led’ (‘worldly desires;’ กิเลส)*. Simultaneously, while the temple sells a variety of sacred objects, monks pray ‘*katha*’ (‘magic words;’ คาถา) for money, so much worse for them. Some monks build a massive ‘*bot*’ (a temple’s building; โบสถ์) and ‘*vihara*’ (a temple’s building; วิหาร) whereas others preach Dhamma together with black magic. Sangha and disciples literally mislead the Buddhist teachings. *Going ‘kao wat’ (nine temples; เก้า*



วัด) *or any number of it means nothing. It is useless if your mind is still impure. So, it is all about mind. Going to the only one temple with mindfulness is worth enough*".

(‘Wor Waen Long Yaa’ (pseudonym); ว.แหวนลงยา)

The author bemoans the current religious circumstances in contemporary Thailand. This poem is protest against the overwhelming force of spiritual-oriented and money-oriented ‘Buddhist’ behaviours. *Wai phra kao wat* is often criticised because it distorts Buddhist teaching. Nevertheless, the sacredness of *wai phra kao wat* remains prevalent in modern Thai perception. At the end of the poem, the author tried to persuade readers to reconsider the essential values of meritorious virtue in popular Buddhism. The author emphasised that ‘intention’ known to Thai ‘*cetana*’ (เจตนา) is the most important when participating Buddhist practices. Nevertheless, the author did not identify *wai phra kao wat* as a mistreatment of Buddhism. It is an alternative meritorious practice of Thai Buddhism in modernity.

The third example is a quotation from the film poster ‘9 wat’ (see a synopsis of film in chapter 3) said,

Bad kamma attacks you,  
you donate money,  
you release birds and fishes,  
you become a vegetarian,  
you donate a coffin,  
you change your name,  
you pay homage to the Buddha at the nine temples,  
Do you think this is enough to ward off your fate?

(The film, ‘9 wat’) (‘nine temples;’ ‘Secret Sunday;’ 9 วัด)

The statement reflects essential concerns about the current Buddhist situation. For example, most of the laity are misled by the meritorious implication and the notion of kamma embedded in religiosity practices. The beliefs of bad kammic result, for instance, show most Thais are worried about the past. The temples and monks then reinvent ‘religious’ practices to embrace ‘*kwam sabai jai*’ (‘the comfortable feeling;’ ความสบายใจ; see details in chapter 4) to the lay people. When the Buddhist practices have been increasingly linked to worldly affairs, they provoke ethical concerns about the essential values of Buddhism.

Despite the fact that many Thais criticise *wai phra kao wat* as non-Buddhist practice, in fact it amounts to a reinvigoration of Buddhist practice. *Wai phra kao wat* regardless a form of Buddhist practice or religious tourism potentially attracts a large number of Thais to the core institution and then simultaneously contextualises them in terms of ‘the machinations of states’ (Durrengers 1996: 2). Ignoring bias and discrimination, *wai phra kao wat* consequently sheds light on current socio-religious circumstances that affect the establishment of Buddhism regarding the core institution of Thailand.

Considering the insecurity of life in Thailand, *wai phra kao wat* reflects how Thais embrace self-confidence by rooting their lives in religious conformity. This disposition partially makes most of Thais less imaginative or ‘thinking outside the box’. The conformity in this context refers to the absolute acceptance to adhere to Buddhist disciplines, norms, and customs. For example, in case of *wai phra kao wat*, the practice reflects the fixed ideas from the formulated structure and the formula of ‘auspicious’ meanings associated with the temples’ names (see in chapter 4). Noticeably, although these fixed ideas have impacts contrary to doctrinal Buddhism, the organisers both private and public authorities still persistently support and promote the practice. Similarly, most of Thai people express their acknowledgement by widely partaking in the semi-religious practice. Again, the perceived character of *wai phra kao wat* rhetorically links to the notion of sacred Buddhism. When Thais participate in the practice, they engage with a notion of supernatural power to negotiate their desires (see in chapter 4). Few of them are eager to express dissatisfaction. Instead, based on interviews, when informants were asked about sacred-oriented topics, they often defended themselves by literally introducing with ‘in my opinion...’ or ‘personally, ...’. Many Thais still hold strong beliefs in magical and supernatural power and a strong ‘if you do not believe, do not disparage’ (*mai cheau yaa lobloo;* ไม่เชื่อ อย่าลบหลู่) attitude that pervades the lay community. Consequently, when most of Thais attempt to contribute ‘creative’ innovations that contradict canonical norms, they are often reluctant to criticise such practices because of the sacredness that adheres to them.

One useful way to think of *wai phra kao wat* is to regard it as ‘learning by imitation’. For example, since the route by TAT 2002 was promoted and became successful as a ‘trendy’ activity of modern Thais, its structure as well as the formula of ‘auspiciousness’ (see in chapter 4) has become a ‘role model’ for *wai phra kao wat* practice. Thus, it has been widely emulated by both private and public sectors in different

regions throughout Thailand. The Religious Affairs Department, the Ministry of Culture (2015) for instance promoted the campaign, ‘Once in a beautiful life...on merit routes throughout Thailand’<sup>143</sup>. The campaign was promoted under the project of ‘Promoting pilgrimage tourism from the religious dimension of the practice’<sup>144</sup>. By doing this, the organiser applied the model of *wai phra kao wat* in Bangkok and set up the ‘nine temples’ routes in individual regions around Thailand by calling ‘merit routes’ (*sen tang boon*; เส้นทางบุญ) for pilgrim-tourists.

Another example of the disposition of ‘learning by imitation’ is the imitation of the assumed sacredness grounded in the elements of the practice. The perceived capacity such as auspicious power and spiritual defensive power has become a fundamental idea to rationalise the consistent development of *wai phra kao wat*. So, several temples replicated activities and the selection of ‘sacred’ figures provided in the TAT 2002 route to pursue followers and worshippers to visit their own sites (see in chapter 2 and 4). The imitation of the ‘successful’ model of *wai phra kao wat* and the fertility of ‘sacred’ Buddhism reveals that modern Thais prefer to adopting the successful model to add ‘new’ values and identities. People in power perceive the popularity of *wai phra kao wat* and then use the practice as a means to persuade contemporary Thais to undertake the practice and inculcate the ‘appropriate’ actions required of Thai people.

Although the success of *wai phra kao wat* generates a new character of Thai Buddhists, it reflects that Thai social foundation remains influential for behaviours, norms, and ‘creativity’ of modern Thai people. That is to say, modern Thais’ cognitive framework derives from historical-based and traditional cultural-based foundation. The term of ‘creativity’ in this context refers to the application of cognitive ideas to invent or develop ‘new’ things to serve new roles of modern society. Arguably, the ‘creativity’ of modern Thais is preoccupied with the historio-cultural framework of the traditional Thai society. The complex of invented features of *wai phra kao wat* reveal the preoccupation of the historio-cultural framework that still predominates over social expressions and creativity of modern Thais. Being the oral-based cultural society and being the patronage society have been investigated as an inherent feature inculcating ‘creative’ behaviours of modern Thais.

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<sup>143</sup> “*chuang neung khong cheevit tee ngod ngam...bon sen tang boon tua thai*,” ช่วงหนึ่งของชีวิตที่งดงาม...บนเส้นทางบุญทั่วไทย

<sup>144</sup> “*krong karn song serm karn thong thieaw sen tang sa waeng boon nai miti tang satsana*,” โครงการส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเส้นทางแสวงบุญในมิติทางศาสนา

First, the regime of speech gives rise to the ‘creativity’ of modern Thais. It illustrates from the auspicious formula of the *wai phra kao wat* practice (see in chapter 4). The auspicious meanings relating to the temples’ names and meritorious activities shed light on the preoccupation of the oral-based cultural system of the traditional Thai society. It played a significant role in transmitting knowledge, culture and norms to the people. Due to the fact that most of the Thais in old days were illiterate, oral communication was the effective method to inculcate and communicate with the people. So, there are a large number of narrative stories and myths in various ‘versions’ in Thai communities. The characteristics of oral culture appear to be more flexible and adaptable in which they are beneficial for the ‘creativity’ of agents as they can add or adapt details and description to create ‘new’ versions of the narrative stories to serve different purposes. Morris (2002:53) argues that cultural logics predominate over appearance, ritual practices and belief system. The creativity of modern culture has been transmitted from oral communication.

Second, the reverence for sacred power and the interpretations of sacredness given to time and space by *wai phra kao wat* provided in *wai phra kao wat* reflect the preoccupation of the vertical interpersonal relationship and the patronage system in Thai society. The vertical relationship which is the relations between ‘senior’ and ‘children’ or ‘employers’ and ‘employees’ is an ethical concern in Thai society. In former days, the feudal system suggested social stratification as well as patronisation between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ was prioritised in Thai relationship. For example, Thai monarchy is posited as the Buddhist patronage. He distributes funds and facilities to support temples’ services. As a result, the Supreme Patriarch and Sangha are responsible for Buddhist services in royal ceremonies in order to reward the monarchy’s sponsorship. Paralleling to this, when Thais encounter living difficulties, superstitious or spiritual power requiring from magic monks, invisible saints, and deities is distinctively considered as a spiritual solution. Worshippers are necessary to pay back to the deities when they receive their wishes. These two examples elucidate the structure of relationship that traces influence on attitudes and perceptions of modern Thai people.

In modern days, the patronage system is evident from the belief of sacred power of popular Buddhism. Most of modern laities are then reluctant to challenge or rhetorically to convert ‘sacred’ into ‘profane’ implication by ignoring it. Instead, they strive to incorporate the sacred power as integral part of popular Buddhism to support the existence and functionality of Buddhist institution in the modern Thai context. In

accordance with this, the hybridity of Buddhism including the influence of religions, deities, royal cults and charismatic objects (see in chapter 3) illustrates the perceived ability of Buddhism in relation to the modern Thai laities in contemporary Thai society. The vertical relationship related to the ordering of *wai phra kao wat* such as the arrangement of timing schedule and order of destination on the route exemplifies the existence of this relationship in modern Thai society.

The patronage implication embodied in ‘new’ cultural practices however has been changed from the sense of reciprocity to the sense of obligation. That is to say, modern Thai cultures have been organised and administrated to serve the central regime rather than intrinsicity of social demands. Siraporn (2016:161) argues state-oriented demands precipitate the dynamic changes of either customs or traditions in the recent Thailand. For example, the Thai state reinvented, “*wai phra sib wat seub sirisawat kao ratchakarn*” (Paying homage to the nine royal temples for the long-lasting auspiciousness of the nine reigns of Chakri dynasty; ไหว้พระเก้าวัดสืบสิริสวัสดิ์แกัรัชกาล) from the popularity of *wai phra kao wat*. The adaptation emerges from the attempt to address the significant turning point in modern Thai history. Again, the Thai state still adheres to the legitimacy of the three core institutions in modern Thailand.

The success of *wai phra kao wat* mirrors taste, preference and intrinsic dispositions of modern Thais. Being ‘modern’ in Thailand is also to be preoccupied by a traditional past. Consequently, when the attempt to transmit social elements between ‘old’ and ‘new’ characters via the inventing process of modern Thai culture like *wai phra kao wat* is considered, it effectively alleviates anticipating conflicts between conservationists and modernists. Moreover, such the attempt helps to contribute the ‘harmonious’ society which is a serious concern in recent Thailand.

### *Wai phra kao wat: the visualisation of the ‘imagined’ community of Thailand*

The engagement of traditional and innovative concepts is a key idea to contribute the recognition of *wai phra kao wat* for both individuals and public organizations in modern Thai society. Conventionally, the variety of religious symbols and merit and demerit concepts rationalise behind the norms and values of almost all kinds of social activities and actions. Nevertheless, when the religio-social practices are publicly exposed, they are often criticised as a cause of moral deterioration. For *wai phra kao wat*,

in contrast, their emerging roles increasingly gain recognition and acceptance towards both the state and modern people because it is rhetorically interpreted as an emerging form of Buddhist practice rather than a religio-social practice in contemporary society. The application of myths and folkloric belief emphasises the significance of cultural identity to cultivating unique character of '*Thai-ness*'. Contemporarily, the advancement of science and technology has affected traditional components into serving new functions. The formation of development by the contemporary Thai polity principally emerges from the transitional process by blending 'new' and 'old' concepts together. Morris (1994:35) notes, 'the definition characteristic of the contemporary Thai polity seems to be its duality, its maintenance of two rhetorics of the body and the structures of looking. This duality cannot be evaded with reference to a transitional stage. Thailand exists in the nexus of transnationalist capitalist relations and information technologies that define the contemporary world. The transitional process is intended to satisfy all Thais and at the same time to disrupt violence and conflicts that possibly happen when making an absolute decision.

Associated with *wai phra kao wat*, the practice is embraced not only as a means of sustaining Buddhism but also expanding it into the 'new' role as cultural-oriented capital in the modern economic system. The practice becomes commoditised as religious tourism in the economic capitalism. Simultaneously, it has been a means of preserving identity and mutually benefiting core institutions in the eye of the modern Thai state. I argue that *wai phra kao wat* provides the active force to unite social fragments into the single sphere in which the Thai state's demands have compromised. According to Anderson (1991: 12), the 'imagined' community involves the unity of nationalism. However, he notes that we must be viewed in relation to the culture from which it emerged. The cultural system from which Thai nationalism emerged is both a 'religious community' and 'dynastic realm'. Both components are fundamental to Thai nationalism today (Anderson 1991:12). Interestingly, *wai phra kao wat* conveys the new movement of Buddhist institution in Thailand. The state recognises the dynamism and significance of the practice, then employs it as a novel source of power capable of effectively communicating the state's demands without violence. Even though this form of state exercise may not be new, it seems to be achieving wide success. The practice rhetorically contributes to an "imagined" moral community that engages the three main components of religion, nation, and monarchy in an attempt to connect people and authorities.

In conclusion, although Buddhism in different cultures and its coherence of the world view has gained persistently attention from anthropologists (Gellner 1990: 109), Buddhist contingencies among the rapid growth of media technology and political uncertainty still need to be addressed. The study of *wai phra kao wat* sheds light on an exemplary model to investigate how Thais critique Buddhist values from different perspectives and how Buddhism embroil itself to maintain the identity in conditional situations. The success of *wai phra kao wat* may be it is ideological familiarity, in actual fact is manifestation of state's authority. While the practice incorporates the novelty and convenience of domestic tourism, its philosophical foundation is based on the conservative ideology of nation, monarchy, and religion that has been the dominant state discourse in the last century.

## Appendices

### Ethics

The study is conducted under the code of practice of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (The ASA 2011). The study was carried out in Bangkok, Thailand from July 2015 to September 2016.

In terms of the applied methods, I made my informants aware of my position when conducting fieldwork. Doing this meant that when I observed and participated in pilgrimage practices in order to convey the locations and understand the common activities, I simultaneously built up rapport with the relevant gatekeepers. These included monks, nuns (*mae chii*) and temple workers, who were made aware of my research project and aims. After I introduced myself to gatekeepers I briefly described my project, asked for their consent and assured them of full participant confidentiality and safety. I also provided written consent forms and information sheets (both in English and Thai). I mainly employed these for the officials and the key informants.

Additionally, I observed participants, such as pilgrims and tourists, at the sites being studied but due to the scale of the events being held (The ASA 2011) it was impossible to approach every participant. Accordingly, when I photographed someone I'd observed, I verbally asked for permission and noted their name and contact details. During interviews I took notes and used an audio-recording device for data gathering and checking my understanding. The field notes and visual data were kept confidential at all times and the anonymity of subjects maintained throughout.

In terms of security, all collected data was kept in a safe place. My notes and electronic data were stored separately to reduce the risk of my informants being identified or linked with specific comments. I created password-lock or shut down my computer when it is not in use. When I backed-up data, I stored the copies separately in a secure location, such as a safe. I never distributed documents in electronic form due to the risk of hacking. Instead, in my notes I used abbreviations, acronyms and symbols known only to me. After the research is published I will delete any files that my informants require me to.



[illegible]

Months	08/	09/	10/	11/	12/	01/	02/	03/	04/	05/	06/	07/
Work Planning	15	15	15	15	15	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
1.Going to the nine temples and getting the rapport												
2.Semi-structured interviewing gatekeepers in the field												
3.Observing the practice and surrounding areas												



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